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PETERSBURG TALES

By *Olive Garnett*

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Petersburg Tales

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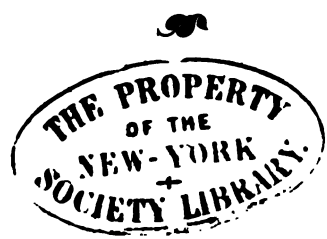
Petersburg Tales

By

Olive Garnett



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THE CASE OF VETROVA

THERE was an uneasy feeling abroad in St. Petersburg. It had penetrated into our apartments, brought by each successive comer returning for the evening meal; and now, as we sat, a party of four, at the square table in the barely-furnished, lofty, yet small dining-room, it was very present to us all, both in our increased sense of intimacy under its shadow, and in the difficulty of sustaining any conversation unconnected with it. We looked questioningly at one another.

I, an English *mees* boarding in the house, my daily occupation the giving of English lessons in exchange for lessons in Russian, sat facing Sophie Ivanovna, a Russian lady of German extraction, who came from Moscow. Anna Philipovna and Philip Andreitch, her son, a student, faced one another. I noticed that Sophie Ivanovna scarcely ate anything. She was a kind-hearted, middle-aged sentimentalist who had many protégées among the girl students from

Moscow; she studied the fashion-plates, dressed elegantly, and laced tightly; her tendencies were Liberal; one might say that she belonged to two camps, the official one by her ambitions, the Liberal one by her sympathies. When the roast appeared she put a dainty handkerchief to her eyes.

'That poor girl! that poor girl!' she murmured. She referred, of course, to Vetrova, of whom our minds were so full; nevertheless there was a dead silence among us at the words, as though something very unexpected had happened. I bent my head lower to my plate. I was interested. Not so very long ago, in December, a few days before her arrest, this girl, this peasant student, had been with us, actually here in this very room. She had come to see me on a trifling errand, to bring a message from a mutual acquaintance, and, as at the moment we were at tea, she had sat down and had spoken a few words. Thus we had all an impression of her. She had struck me as being serious, independent, resolute; but I found something unpleasing in her vivacity in conversation and brusque manner. As to her appearance, there was nothing remarkable about it. She was not good-looking, short rather than tall, and shabbily, carelessly dressed.

After a few minutes she had got up and gone away. Probably the company was not to her taste; besides, she told us that she was in a hurry. Anna Philipovna had remarked that she was a typical

student, and that such a type must give a bad impression to foreigners. She had then made some severe observations upon the young woman in particular, and on women-students in general, and the conversation had passed to national types and Tourguéneff's heroines.

But how clearly I now recalled Vetrova's every word and look, though they had roused no special interest at the time, and but for her fate, would have passed into the limbo of casual impressions. With what startling life her figure rose before me; how her brusque movements and rough energy now seemed to mock at the feeble attempts I remembered making at the time to smooth away the feeling that she was out of place in our company, and to make things go pleasantly! She *had* been out of place, of course; and how could it have been otherwise? I thought, looking round. All the same, that attempt of mine, that bit of appreciation, had linked me to her, had given me slight possession of her for the brief moment; and now, in death. She was dead; no one might find of her so much as her burial-place; yet her bright, living, jarring presence seemed but just gone from the room. A tide of compassion for all human creatures rose in my heart, uniting the living and the dead in one warm embrace. The room swam before me.

I had known next to nothing personally of Vetrova. She was a native of Tchernigov, where she had

taught in a provincial school. Her mother had made great sacrifices to give her an education, and finally sent her, with twenty or thirty roubles in her pocket, to study in Petersburg. A professor who knew her at home wrote at the time to a friend in the capital: 'I am interested in the career of this young girl. Please invite her to your house, and look after her. Get her lessons if possible—she is entirely without means.'

His friend promptly responded, made her acquaintance, and Vetrova came to his house one day. She was content, she said; she had one lesson, which enabled her to get along. When pressed to stay and dine, she replied: 'I am proud, and eat only what I have earned; but I will gladly come to talk with you. If your dinner is ready now, I will go. We shall meet again.'

After that she appeared from time to time. It was difficult to help her, but she seemed to thrive on independence, to be getting on. She wrote articles, one of which attracted attention, not only for its real merit, but because it escaped the censor by a happy chance, and appeared just after an *ordonnance* forbidding all mention of its subject in the press. But in December Vetrova was arrested for a slight offence, and imprisoned in the fortress of St. Peter and St. Paul. Forbidden books had been found in her possession. Her spirits were not affected by this check. Her sister visited her, and found her

gay and hopeful. She was treated well, she said, and complained of nothing but the food—well enough for the peasants with whom she was classed, but to which she had grown unaccustomed in her new life. She was expecting her release in a few weeks, with the comparatively mild sentence of banishment to her native province, when, on February 16, she died from the effects of burning, after two days' horrible suffering. The death, concealed for a fortnight, was discovered by her sister, who, alarmed at not being allowed to see her, and at receiving back again the food and money she had brought, with the remark that 'Vetrova had no longer need of it,' made persistent inquiries. Simultaneously, doubts and suspicions were set afloat by the other female prisoners in the fortress. They had heard screams, and took the opportunity of their removal to the Shpalernaya, the prison of preventive detention, to spread the news that all was not right with Number So-and-so. The girl students at the courses took up the cry, and during these last few days the story had quickly gone the round of the university and the men's institutes in hectograph. Public opinion was more than hinting at foul play in the absence of any official statement whatever on the subject; during the last few hours rumours, one uglier than the other, had been flying from end to end of the city.

Anna Philipovna had no opinion of students, male or female, as a class. She said that they were

unreasonable and untidy, the two greatest offences in her eyes. Her son, who was neither the one nor the other, suffered vicariously on this account. Anna Philipovna was eminently practical, and, although she inclined to be stout, very active. Irritated, in spite of herself, by the moral agitation inseparable from a student disturbance, I felt sure that she was annoyed with me for having been the means of bringing a person subsequently arrested to the house. It was not in her calculations that an English 'young lady' should have anything to do with student riff-raff; at the same time, she was glad to have seen anyone so much talked about. She never left one long in doubt as to *her* opinions, and chief of them was that of the unreasonableness of all people who differed from her.

At length, 'Have you heard anything new to-day?' she briskly asked Sophie Ivanovna, and, as she spoke, she selected a potato with extraordinary care, bending over the dish—she was near-sighted, and the potato was her favourite vegetable.

'There was a death Mass at the Women's College,' replied Sophie Ivanovna, in her odd fluttering manner, which made one think of a frightened hen; 'all the Professors attended, and that eccentric Baroness X. was there.'

'Ah! if the Professors went, then there really is something in it. I wonder they were allowed,' murmured Anna Philipovna.

'Oh, Anna Philipovna, but the girl was burned to death! For two days she never ceased screaming and calling out about some man.'

Sophie Ivanovna had tears in her voice, and hastily gulped down some *qvass*.

'But who was this man—is *that* known?'

Sophie Ivanovna replied that it was not known precisely, but was supposed to be the procureur. He had sent for Vetrova to an interrogation; she was with him, alone, many hours, and he had himself admitted, with tears in his eyes (he had quite broken down before her sister) that he had used threats.'

'Oh, those peasant girls are used to everything,' said Anna Philipovna. 'Besides, a responsible official! And then, in the fortress!'

'Responsible! Ah, who cares what becomes of political prisoners?' sighed Sophie Ivanovna. 'Petersburg or Siberia, it's all the same; and our Russian officials are not brutes—they have kind hearts even. But what will you have with such a Government? From time to time such cases occur, you see.'

Anna Philipovna broke some bread impatiently.

'But hasn't she perhaps killed herself—in despair, or from remorse?' I ventured. 'Perhaps she let out secrets in the interrogation—she seemed so resolute.'

'Miss Foster,' said Anna Philipovna gravely, 'you will never get on in the world, or be a good student of human nature so long as you judge people by yourself. You don't know Russian students.'

Philip's eye twinkled.

'Ah yes, if you were only——'

'Now, Philip!' frowned Anna Philipovna.

'I believe that the poor, noble girl has sacrificed herself to call attention to the shocking state of things, the hideous immorality in the fortress,' sobbed Sophie Ivanovna.

'They say that a warder——' began Philip again.

'Please don't, Philip!' exclaimed his mother, holding up her hands; 'the students' stories are always ten times worse than the others.'

Her son, a young man with a shock of fair curly hair, large clear eyes, a freckled skin, a Mephistophelian expression about the mouth, and wearing the regulation cloth coat adorned with the large gilt buttons of his institute, was silent, and cut a slice from the loaf with care. I turned to Sophie Ivanovna:

'I heard that she upset the lamp over her clothes; but how did she come to have a lamp? I thought they were forbidden to politicals after the S—— affair.'

'The girls say that she was allowed to read at night as she couldn't sleep, and in the section for peasants there is no electric light. But there's another story, that in returning from the procureur she was left for a moment in the passage where the lamps are cleaned, and poured the kerosene——'

'Horrible!' ejaculated Anna Philipovna, signing to the servant to take away.

'Some say——' ventured Philip.

'Don't! we can imagine what the students say,' his mother cut him short.

Philip again relapsed into silence. He seldom had a chance to get far with any sentence seriously intended, but if he began amusingly, Anna Philipovna would listen to him with indulgence, and would even sometimes faintly smile. She affected to treat him as a child, always making him responsible when anything went wrong with which he had to do. He told me once seriously that he thought women unjust and capricious. He listened to what they were pleased to say, but, in his mother's presence especially, maintained, as far as possible, a discreet silence. He had no weight in the household. I sympathized with him; I shouldn't have been so patient myself. We were very good friends, though we scarcely ever spoke to one another: the tacit understanding sufficed; besides, it was difficult to be openly sympathetic in Anna Philipovna's scornful presence, and unnecessary also, as we were sensitive and had a sense of humour, but we used to come conversationally to one another's assistance. We pretended that we took every domestic crisis lightly, humorously, and contested who should pretend this the best. There were many domestic crises; we by no means always felt ourselves vanquished, and Philip occasionally made rather a skilful use of the reinforcement that Fate had thrown in his way.

I supposed now that he would not speak again the whole evening, and I found myself gazing expectantly at Sophie Ivanovna. For some minutes she had been on the brink of a disclosure; a secret was burning within her—one saw that in her flurry and nervous movements; but Anna Philipovna was so cold, inattentive to her, wrathful even, that the poor lady didn't know how to get it out. In her despair she looked at us, and said abruptly, and all in a flutter:

'You young people must be careful just now—you especially, Philip Andreitch; it's a dangerous time, and misfortunes never come singly. Imagine'—this very rapidly—'I was followed home here, all the way from the island, this very evening.' She paused; she had made her little effect, and continued, while we looked curiously at her: 'Of course, *I* am ready to suffer for my principles. I felt uncomfortable—not on my own account, oh no! but for the sake of my dear young friends whose door I had just left. I must contrive to give them warning that their visitors are watched. When I saw that I was followed (the horrid man sprang, as it were, from the ground as I left the house) I thought, "Better not take an *isvostchik*, it looks suspicious," so I walked all that long way home, and that is the real reason, dear Anna Philipovna, why I was unavoidably late for dinner. I hoped that the wretch would leave me, and from time to time I stopped before a shop-window and looked in; I think *that* was clever,

wasn't it? I didn't dare look round to see if he stopped too, but no doubt he did, for when I reached this door——'

'Do you mean to say that a detective followed you to my house?' demanded our hostess in an excited tone.

Poor Sophie Ivanovna! she was not to enjoy fully her little triumph.

'Yes, to the very door,' she answered importantly.

'Really, madam, then I must beg you to cease your visits to the island while——'

There was a loud ring at the electric bell. We all started involuntarily. Anna Philipovna glared at Sophie Ivanovna, and I dare say we each felt the same odd sensation about our hearts. There was a moment's quiet, then the servant appeared. Philip rose and waved her away. We followed him anxiously with our eyes as he went into the hall. Absurd as it may seem, we felt uneasy; we had caught the general contagion, and really, if we come to think of it, no one of us was in a position to answer for any other.

To our relief we presently heard a low, feminine voice, the shutting of the outer doors, and the sound of galoshes being taken off.

'A young lady for Sophie Ivanovna,' Philip announced, returning, and he added rather maliciously, 'One of your young friends, I think. She has gone into your room.'

'Pray excuse me,' quavered Sophie Ivanovna.

She hastily shook hands with her by no means mollified hostess, included us in a sweeping bow, and hurried, rustling, away.

'Sophie Ivanovna is a goose, and annoys me excessively,' remarked Anna Philipovna, recovering herself when the door had closed. 'Of course, I don't believe for a moment that she was followed, though our police are almost stupid enough for that; but she's right in saying that one can't be too careful. I hope *you* are careful, Miss Foster. I don't feel altogether easy about you.'

She compressed her lips, passed me the fruit and helped herself. Philip began to peel an apple resignedly.

'Sophie Ivanovna thoroughly enjoyed herself today,' he observed.

'Oh yes,' fretfully returned his mother; 'but she almost invariably misses either the first or second half of her dinner. That comes of associating with students; they have no conscience in these matters; they don't keep regular hours themselves, and they never even consider those who do—running in and out at all times; they never even think of apologizing. Ah, Miss Foster, you really have no idea of Russian students; if you had——' Anna Philipovna couldn't find words. 'They are, on the whole, an immoral, dirty, and lazy set—men and women; but, to a reasonable being, their folly is even more exasperating

than their vices,' she went on. 'They say that the *system* is responsible; *I* say that every man and woman is responsible for him or herself. And then, what are their boasted convictions worth? If an Englishwoman—if you, Miss Foster—went in for "reforming" your country, "abolishing" your Government, if you took part in conspiracies, and prayed each day for a revolution, you, I am sure, would be prepared for anything—imprisonment, exile, death, disgrace; you would find all in the day's work. We *have* had such examples—a few—and I myself dreamed of sacrifice——'

Anna Philipovna flushed up; I nodded.

'But *our* students' (there was infinite scorn in Anna Philipovna's voice)—'our youth is different. It chatters, it shrieks, it poses. Our youth is cowardly, and at every little pinch it cries out. Our young people scramble for places or commit suicide. They have no backbone, no dignity, no self-respect.'

Anna Philipovna, quite out of breath, took another apple. I couldn't help glancing at Philip; he reddened and muttered:

'*You* will cry out if I am arrested to-morrow.'

His mother put down her apple. I thought that she turned a shade paler.

'How arrested? I don't understand. *You* are not mixed up in this, I hope?'

'We shall all be mixed up at the demonstration.'

'What demonstration? They are not so mad as

to attempt a demonstration, are they? Answer me, Philip.'

'Well, they've all promised, even the "Ways and Communications" swells. We're to meet at twelve o'clock in the Kazan Cathedral to hear a death Mass for Vetrova.'

'Is this true?' gasped Anna Philipovna, turning to me.

'I believe so,' stammered I.

'Then, Philip, I absolutely forbid you to go.'

The young man regarded his mother with his usual rather Mephistophelian expression, much as some schoolboys look at butterflies on pins; the poor woman had now that helpless air.

'Miss Foster,' appealing to me, 'it is simply madness. A few hot-headed boys go, they walk into the net with their eyes open, they are trapped, and that's the end of them and all their fine hopes and schemes. And their poor families, mothers, orphans, looking to them for bread, what becomes of *them?* How can any of these planned affairs come off with our police organization? Will anyone so much as get into the cathedral? Madness, I tell you, simply madness! And what's the good of a demonstration; will it bring the dead back to life? And suppose it does take place, everything goes on just as before. It's merely giving the authorities an opportunity for "weeding the institutes"'—her voice rose—'that was the very expression the Minister of

Education made use of to me when I went to him about your cousin Vassily. He said: "We must weed the institute, madam"—his own words. Philip, you know perfectly well that I shall not dream of allowing you to go. If I die, what will become, then, of your little sister?'

'We all have ties,' Philip replied. 'If we thought always of our little sisters nothing would ever be done.'

'And it's always the youth that's sacrificed, Miss Foster,' his mother continued—'lads who might be a credit to their families if they were not so eaten up with folly. Once caught and sent away before they have finished their studies, what is to become of them? Their careers are stopped, their whole lives utterly ruined. Now Philip, for instance, if he passes his final this spring is provided for for life.'

Anna Philipovna looked doubtfully at her son.

'How shameful, then,' said I, 'that the middle-aged people, the people with position, the people whom it isn't to be supposed the Government could entirely suppress, leave the whole burden of protest on the young people's shoulders! Why don't they come forward? why don't the parents back up their children?'

Anna Philipovna coloured.

'Of what use is a man over forty in Russia?' she said. 'Have you met a single one with a spark of enthusiasm or self-sacrifice? The idea of citizen-

ship isn't even conceived here, except perhaps in the literary set; there are, of course, a very few; but the rest are logs, simply logs of wood, or something has broken in them. No, let the young men keep quiet till they have finished their studies and got their diplomas, till they have some weight, and their protest is worth something. What does the Government care for a crowd of half-starved, shabby, silly boys?'

'Well, *maman*,' Philip said slowly, 'will you go to the death Mass to-morrow instead of me?'

'Good gracious! no, indeed. Miss Foster, I do hope *you* are not thinking of going.'

'It would be very interesting for me, a foreigner.'

'It would be too interesting. There may be fighting, the Cossacks might ride you down' (Anna Philipovna certainly already saw me wounded, bleeding, trampled under foot), 'or you might be shot, and, if not that, you might get pushed along somewhere in the crowd, and shut up before you knew where you were. And how unpleasant to have to give explanations! "You are a foreigner?" they would ask. "Who are you?" "What were you doing?" You would be sent home with a caution, subjected to all sorts of annoyance, and be followed about till you were tired of your life. No, if one wants to live in peace here, one mustn't even dream of politics.'

A constrained silence succeeded these words.

Philip's eyes wandered round the room. I hadn't made up my mind whether I should go or not yet; I didn't feel disposed to say anything, and Philip less than ever, apparently. The dinner had come to an end.

'Well, Philip,' said Anna Philipovna at last, 'you understand that I forbid you to go to-morrow. I hope that no one in this house will be so foolish, so insane, as to think of it.'

We all rose. I shook hands with Anna Philipovna, and Philip put his lips to her forehead. She went into the drawing-room.

Philip held the door leading into the corridor open for me. I was about to pass by, but something induced me to half turn, and then I stopped wholly. He was looking fixedly at his hand, which fingered the door-latch; his face wore a strange expression, nothing Mephisto-like in it now. Without raising his head, he said in a low voice:

'My mother, she's hopeless—you see for yourself; and she's always like that. She says she once dreamed of doing something; well, it may be so, and now she's a *Liberal*—one of those Liberals with Government pensions! You see what a panic she's in on account of this affair. But why talk of her indeed? Don't pay any attention. If you want to go to-morrow, go, and say nothing about it. It's all the same for you, but I—I—am a coward.'

I hardly caught the last word; he seemed weighed

down by it. All at once he looked feeble—old, somehow—transformed.

'Oh, Philip Andreitch——' I was beginning, but he took a pace back into the room, and burst out:

'"Useless gift, accidental gift!
Life, why art thou given to me?
* * * * *
Filling my heart with passion,
Agitating my mind with doubt."

'Look here,' he said, coming back and stopping before me, 'tell me, what do you think—shall I go to-morrow or not? I want you to tell me—if you think—— I'll go.'

How astonished I was!—I, who thought I knew him, and who had rather admired his calmness through dinner. This the reserved, the cynical Philip! Pooh! He had pretended long enough; this at last was the uncovered reality. I saw it. Nevertheless I looked at him in amazement, stammering stupidly:

'But, Philip Andreitch, I am not even Russian; how can I tell, how can I decide for you?'

He made an impatient gesture.

'That doesn't matter at all; you *understand.* Oh God, why is my heart so empty, my mind so vacant? I have no convictions; there is no meaning in life for me. It's true what she says of us—suicide. I wish—yes, I wish—I could die.'

He walked away, and I stood looking after him in

mute sympathy. He gave me a measure. I had a sense of something plucking at him, dragging him down, lower, lower. With him I felt the purposelessness, dreariness, despair of his life, and beyond, of the life of young Russia. A wave of doubt, even dread, shook me as a chill gust of wind passing shakes a leaf. All at once he reminded me of some portrait I had seen; I couldn't remember where.

'Philip,' I said tremulously, desperately, 'you know it isn't so hopeless. Why not take a larger view—look beyond? Suppose this our generation does nothing, wastes away, is ruined; others are hurrying quickly after it—forces that we know nothing of are perhaps silently at work. If we, if a few people bear in their hearts the sorrow, the despair; if we are not created for action, if circumstances are too strong, we—we do our part in suffering.'

I spoke bravely, but I felt helpless and angry; I didn't believe what I said. He came up again to where I stood and fidgeted about.

'So that's what you say. Very well, so be it. Good, and tell me, am I to go to-morrow?'

'Ah!'

Philip stood staring at me with large, expressionless eyes, and I stood staring at him. I felt vaguely that there was something pitiless in him at that moment. But it was no duel between us; it was a duet, and in the silence the mournful screech of a

tram-whistle from the distance found an echo in our hearts, filling them with sad foreboding.

He had certainly put his case clearly enough. A sharp familiar pang, a dreaded presentiment, told me that involuntarily I was about to accept a new responsibility, that there was something difficult to be faced.

'Wait!' I brought out heavily, and I went abruptly to my own quarters.

Ah! how inexpressibly dreary my ordinarily cosy-looking room seemed as I came in, how lifeless and uninteresting the books, pictures, letters, journals, as I turned the light upon them! 'And must it always be like this?' I thought, while a sort of nausea for this life rising within me made my head turn dizzy. My room looked into the courtyard. I knelt up on the window-sill, pressed my face to the steamy window-pane, and looked out. All round the court-yard I saw lamp-lit rooms, and in some, where the curtains had not been drawn, I saw people sitting.

'What is going on silently everywhere now?' I thought. 'And what will have happened by this time to-morrow? How helpless one is!'

A long time I gazed, almost choked by my sensations, my stifling sick dread. At last I let fall the blind.

A pile of English newspapers, tied up with string, was lying on my table. I had promised it to an acquaintance living not very far off. It seemed to

me that I wanted fresh air, and to get away. I hastily began to rummage for my cap, gloves, and scarf, opened all the ventilators, and taking up the bundle of newspapers, I went out into the hall. I was afraid that Philip, hearing my step, would come, as he sometimes did, to help me on with my fur. But he didn't appear. I put on my galoshes, hoisted on my *shuba*, and went hurriedly out.

It seemed like an escape, emerging into the brilliant greenish light on the staircase. A door was just closing on some rather noisy officers who visited below, then all was quiet, not a sound to be heard. I ran quickly down. In the hall the good-natured Swiss rose, bowed low, and handed me a letter, smiling. It was from England. I opened it at once, and skimming the pages, came to, 'but, above all, I rely on your good sense and clear-sighted——' I crammed the letter into my pocket, made for the door, and stepped out. 'Bother good sense!' I cried, in my exasperated mood; 'that's all very well as an everyday affair, but what of the times when intense feeling, boiling emotion, alone can carry us convincingly, triumphantly along?'

I looked round. The air was raw, and the almost deserted prospect was blotted in fine driving sleet, which quickly beaded every hair in my fur. Two sledges were crawling after one another slowly down the street; in the distance I saw the green twinkling of vanishing tram-lights. I set off, hurrying along as

fast as the weight of my *shuba* would allow, occupied with my problem. The excitement of the last few days had affected me, and the conversation at the dinner-table, followed by the unexpected self-revelation of Philip, put the finishing-touch to my agitation. Scurrying thoughts, contradictory impressions, came and went and crossed one another. Philip, in his weakness and self-distrust, had wakened sleeping things in me. I hated for the moment my own English characteristics, brutal in their naked force, as they seemed; I hated the apparent superiority of my race. And yet lack of will-power, the terrible disease of the Russians, of the heart of the country itself, rolled over me a deeper wave of humiliation. My cheeks glowed with shame under cool, pricking sleet-drops, as I thought of all my people had done without a tithe of the lovable, the endearing great qualities of this. I simply couldn't bear the triumph of what in my heart of hearts I judged the meaner side. Again, 'The disease is in the whole land,' I thought, and without any other considerations I felt so deeply ashamed of the moral cowardice and shirking I had witnessed here, that a longing seized me to rush at the first obstacle and sacrifice mysel in an attempt to wipe out a little of the stain. An absolute need for the purification of self-sacrifice, a thirst for regeneration, was upon me. I felt that no terror in the whole universe could give me pause for a moment in the effort to satisfy my painful yearning

desire. Tears of profound humility filled my eyes, and I trembled, stumbling as I walked. Feeble creature that I was, it seemed to me that my death would be somehow precious, that it could atone in some way. Then I shiveringly, even more humbly, began to feel in all my consciousness the slow, monotonous ache of time, and to crushingly realize that the great expiation is to painfully live.

As, agitated by these emotions, I drew nearer the Nevsky, I met more people, some of them students, in twos and threes, their hands in their pockets, and their collars up to their eyes. I looked curiously, wistfully, at them. What were their reflections this night, and what would have befallen them by the next, when all would be over?

But there were very few passers-by; probably the weather accounted for this. The stout, gray-coated inspectors of police at the Anitchkoff Bridge seemed to have it all to themselves as they stood looking up and down the wide, lit thoroughfare. I crossed over, and soon found myself at Evgenia's door.

Evgenia, as everyone in Petersburg literary circles knows, is an advanced champion of women's rights, a critic, and a feuilletonist. None of her articles have creative merit, but she is regarded as a decidedly rising authority. She is a little, fair, fluffy-haired creature, not very young now, but bright and good-looking. Some years ago she married the brilliant *littérateur* D., just then shooting up like a rocket; but

he drank, his success was very short-lived, and she managed to get a divorce from him. She is known by her maiden name. There are always some aspiring young writers round her to whom she is giving a helping hand; and at her parties, in the foreground, the great critic B. may be generally seen, standing in his favourite attitude, with his hand under his chin, smiling condescendingly upon them. The great B. rarely says more than two words to anyone on these occasions. He reserves himself for his Sunday articles, and he never gives more than two fingers to anyone; but he has a colossal presence, and the shadow of it rests always at Evgenia's; one seems to see it as a frame to her fluffy head when one comes to her to consult the oracle.

'Oh, you good creature!' cried Evgenia as I came in; 'excuse my getting up, my back aches. Here, Masha, put a chair for the young lady, and bring tea. Well, and what's the news? I'm fearfully dull; I can't go out, you see, and no one's been near me the whole day.'

Evgenia was lying back in a loose gown, in a long chair, with her pretty little feet to the glow of the open stove-door. Around, about, everywhere, on the chairs and lounges, covered with Eastern draperies, were carelessly flung books, reviews, every sort and kind of current literature in many languages (Evgenia spoke four or five with equal

correctness and fluency), and the warm, close atmosphere was heavy with the fragrance of Turkish tobacco. There was an array of cigarettes, match-boxes, and ash-trays at her right hand. She pointed to this assortment.

'Ah! you don't smoke? You've dined? Yes? Then we'll have a cup of tea together. Ah, yes!' She clapped her hands. 'Masha, bring plenty of cream for the young lady. A terrible business, this in the fortress, isn't it?' she said suddenly, as we sipped our tea. 'You're going to the demonstration to-morrow, of course?'

'I don't know. Are you?'

Evgenia gave me a half-reproachful look.

'Oh no; my uncle, you know. Have you heard? He has just got a cross, and he's so delighted! he says he'll take me with him to Paris in the spring.'

'How jolly! I congratulate you.'

'Yes, it really is gratifying,' said she, brightening up; 'and uncle is such a good-natured man—a Russian heart—I'm sure I shall have a good time. But about this girl; what a disgraceful scandal! A warder has simply assaulted her, and then murdered her to conceal his guilt; that's evident. He must have just thrown the kerosene over her, and set fire to her clothes.'

'Evgenia Pavlovna, what are you saying? What an awful idea!'

'Oh, you don't know what goes on in that fortress.

Don't forget you're in Russia. But *you* think she took her own life, then?'

'I? Oh, *I* don't know anything—only from what I hear. But it seems probable——'

'Yes, yes' (Evgenia raised herself on her elbow), 'if I write an article for the foreign press I'll take that line—it's better, but' (she fell back again) 'I shan't write, it's too risky; and besides, you know I've quite lost interest in politics and all that sort of thing now. Why, at one time I was a tremendous radical. I wore a red blouse, and actually did "go among the people" one summer; but I couldn't stand the life, and besides, it was absurd. I don't think Tolstoi has much following now, do you? Perhaps in Moscow; but he has completely lost vogue since he took to writing tracts. As I was saying, I was almost a revolutionary—all in our set were. Everyone who had been in prison was a hero; there *were* heroes then'—she muttered some names —'God knows what's become of them!' Evgenia fell to musing; then she took a fresh cigarette. 'Well, and now all that's passed away, we're under a reactionary wave. Why, the other night at B.'s there was such a handsome young man—a political, fresh from prison. He came in full of life and fire, and began at once to tell his experiences, sure of a cordial reception. Poor fellow! I felt quite sorry for him. Some years ago, it is true, he would have been lionized, fêted. We were in the middle of a discussion

on symbolism—Maeterlinck—and we fell to talking again immediately. What was symbolism to him? When we remembered his existence again, he was gone; and that's typical. Only sometimes the old feeling wakes. I saw a young face in the street the other day, the face of an enthusiast—a Shelley. And, indeed, it may have been a Shelley who will perish unknown. I wish now so much I had spoken to him! But, dear me, no; those dreams have faded for us.' Evgenia sighed, threw in another log, and stretched out her tiny feet cosily again to the stove. 'As for my youngest brother, Volodia, he simply annoys me,' she continued, with a shrug. 'He rushed in here for a few minutes, tremendously excited; he says he's going to the demonstration to-morrow. He talked, shouted, gesticulated, at a great rate, and I felt as if I had taken up a sensational novel. It was how *I* used to talk, by the way, but having long ceased to concern myself with such nonsense, it seems hard to believe it's all going on just the same as before. These young people talk so exaggeratedly, are so impressionable. Volodia left me in a rage, calling me all sorts of names because I tried to cool his ardour a little. Of course, one expects that.' Evgenia looked pensive, but only for a moment. 'Among other nice things Volodia said I had no principles—that none of us Russian journalists have. Journalists! Well, that's the sort of calumny the young people throw at us, struggling every day

of our lives with the censorship; and what a censorship, you know! As it happens, I have a striking proof, too, of the very reverse. I have been resolving to cut F. Suvorin held out a hand to him, and I hear that he has gone on the staff of the *Novoe Vremya*. It has made a great sensation; it's such a pity! F. is so clever (to do Suvorin justice, it is wonderful what talent he manages to get hold of); but, of course, no one who respected himself could write for a Government organ. And people say we Russian journalists are unprincipled!'

Evgenia continued to talk on in the same mingled strain of sentiment and indifference. I did not stay much longer. The atmosphere of her room oppressed me; my head began to ache. I confess that I should have liked to have shaken her; but then, wouldn't it be absurd to get angry with such a little fluffy-haired gossamer creature; and doesn't one hear just the same thing everywhere in her set, dressed up in pretty phrases from abroad?

I longed for a blow on the quays, and moved off in that direction. Evgenia had talked about the young people, but with little sympathy. '*The young people.*' That magic phrase evoked visions for me. I saw young Russia, with whom is the future, now lying bruised, humiliated, half torpid; vanquished, yet breathing; moving now and again, ominously moaning like some creature in painful sleep. I saw, and, as I took my way through narrow, dark streets, with

here and there a drink-shop casting a vivid patch of light on stupefied and noisy peasants emerging from and swallowed up in the shadows beyond, I felt poignantly the grief of these, and the agonies of the few walking with the light of justice and humanity in their eyes, with such a dead weight at their backs. I saw the forces of the righteous, the armies of the inert, prudent, timid, trustful, disappointed, and the few daring and hopeful calling to one another across the vast echoless plains of their Russia. And I saw the forces of the unrighteous, intent on selfish, petty ends, throned amid passions and stupidities, deaf, blind, strong or despicable; and, encircling all alike, time, slow-moving in eternity, in obscurity, lit here and there by sparkling stars of opportunity.

'And does to-morrow bear with it such an opportunity?' I thought; 'and is to-night's unrest, to-night's fire kindled in our hearts, a most holy inspiration? Dumb Russia moves, shows that she breathes, articulates a syllable. Philip—all—we must all go; we must lay on the altars of this fire every doubt, every hesitation, every tie, that dross may fall away from us, and leave only the pure metal for the sacrifice.'

I had walked hurriedly, and was now coming into another neighbourhood. Faintly from the distance behind me came, mingled, the creaking of slow-drawn wooden sledges, the cracking of whips, the curses and snatches of song of wavering, drunken

passers-by; behind me were uneven pavements, trodden, dirty snow, gurgling rain-pipes, gloomy picturesqueness. Before me stretched a wide, clean-swept street of decorous houses, each house a palace, with lighted portico and dark yard entrance. Decorous were the very lines of gas-lamps before them, and their steady flicker as I went along seemed to cast decorum even round the case of Vetrova. Further on, a warm, reddish light, which I knew well, streamed invitingly from the glass-panelled porch of one of the smaller houses.

S. Street is a street of merchant-princes, foreigners, cosmopolitans outside apprehension. 'Why do I come *here* bearing Vetrova?' I thought, as the magnificent gold-laced Swiss who stood looking out lazily swung open the door. 'What am I doing? what am I seeking?' I asked myself, as I followed him up the shallow, red-carpeted stairs. 'These enlightened folk don't disturb themselves for rumours. All will be peaceful here. Well, it will be a respite.'

I followed another servant into a reception-room, and through into a little boudoir. Everything was indeed peaceful; a clock went tick, tick, and the friendly faces of English pictures on the walls, and the English hearth, with a bright fire burning, really seemed to relegate to the limbo of the fantastic my preoccupations.

The cosmopolitan lady of the house, Madam M.,

came quietly in. She had a pleasant face, hair turning gray, and keen eyes that seemed to take in everything at a glance. Her light silk perfumed gown gracefully set off a youthful figure.

'It so rarely happens that we see anyone in the evening. One is almost sure of a good English talk when you come,' she said, looking thoughtful, and holding me by the hand; 'but it so happens that at present we have someone with us, someone in trouble, and we talk about her affairs in Russian all the time. It is only saying the same thing over and over again; but that seems to give her relief, poor thing, and so we are very patient, and she comes to us to be consoled every day. I will tell you the story, and you shall see for yourself. Perhaps meeting a sympathetic stranger,' added Madam M., with a smile, 'will do her good. I'm not Russian, thank God! but I do feel the tragic atmosphere here overpowering sometimes; it's indescribable, isn't it? —like the sickly smell of incense in the churches. Don't you get involved in any way, my dear; that would be so sad. Anna Mikhailovna is a real Russian —a Little Russian—but she comes from many days' journey away in Trans-Caucasia, where her home is now since her husband's death. For she is a widow, with an only son, a student, in Kazan. Not long ago he was arrested—a fortnight before his final examination—and she hears now that he is to be exiled to A—— as soon as the mild weather comes

on and he can make the journey. She has come here to make interest for him, but it is hardly likely that she will be successful. She is in despair. She says he was so talented his position was almost assured. He was very active, it seems, quite a leader; and yet, while she deplores what she calls his folly, she is intensely proud of him. You will see how she laughs and weeps at the same time. From the first class in school, right through the institutes, and all through life, everyone considers the authorities fair game in this astonishing country. What stories against themselves I have heard professors tell, their eyes moist with laughter——'

Anna Mikhailovna came in just then. 'Provincial' was written on every fold of her black garments, every line of her stout figure, and every smooth black hair on her flat head. There was repose in her folded hands, but fire in her bright black eyes, as she sat in abandonment to her thoughts. I could not but contrast the two women—the one rough-hewn, ruddy, statuesque; the other delicate like a flower, and faintly weary.

'I was telling this young English lady about your son, Anna Mikhailovna,' said my acquaintance in a cheerful tone; 'she feels for you very much; she is a fire-brand herself, I believe.'

Anna Mikhailovna looked up with interest and immediately began to weep softly, but she tried to stop her tears.

'He is very clever, my Dmitri,' she said; 'the Governor says he is very dangerous, and that is why they must send him so far away. For three years they are sending him—think of that!—and then he won't be allowed to come back to Russia—never perhaps. His career is ruined; what can he do at A——? *He* is cheerful enough; he says he will find comrades there, but I know that it will be three years lost out of his life, and that I shan't live to see him again. He is such a good son—if only he were not mixed up with politics. Oh, my Dmitri!'

'Perhaps his exile will steady him; when he comes back to you, a man, he will be a more useful member of society,' said Madam M. gaily, for the sake of saying something.

'That's what the Governor says; but what he calls "steadying" we mothers see is taking the heart out of a young life—if, indeed, he doesn't die outright off there.'

Anna Mikhailovna felt for her pocket-handkerchief.

'But what has he done?' I asked.

'Oh, I don't know; he never talked to me about these things, or told me one word of what was passing in his mind. They say he writes very well, that he sent his writings abroad; they say that he was quite certain to be taken, that probably he was watched for a long time—there are spies, you know,

among the students. Only a fortnight before the examinations! Oh dear! oh dear!'

'Dear lady, there are very few like your son; all Russia is indebted to the mother of such a one; I am so proud to meet you.'

'There, I told you she was a firebrand,' nodded Madam M. delightedly. 'Now, *I* should give Dmitri a good scolding; he is still a bright, naughty little urchin to me. Well, I will leave you together to talk treason, only don't raise your voices, or the servants will hear you; they are Russian.'

She closed one of the doors, and went out by the one I had come through, leaving it slightly ajar. The clock went on tick-tick, tick-tick; it seemed to mark the pause that followed.

'Madam M. has a kind heart,' said Mikhailovna, pursuing her thoughts aloud, 'but she never was a mother. She thinks three years a mere trifle, but I was counting on spending them with Dmitri; his education has separated us so much. Do you think I did wrong, mademoiselle? I never discouraged him, or forbid him anything. He is like his father; his father required, above all, sympathy, and I thought Dmitri must go his own way, but now see what sorrow it has brought.'

Anna Mikhailovna talked on in a low voice, relating here an anecdote of the son, here of the father—she evidently confused them in her mind at times—and I sat close to her, gazing into the

immense room beyond (the familiar house seemed strange to-night), listening, and wondering how it would be if I, too, found myself in such a predicament. Somehow or other a little golden anchor—a *breloque* which hung on my watch-chain—found its way into her hand, with some message of sympathy to this unknown Dmitri in his prison. I remember feeling a little guilty—why, Heaven knows—when Madam M. came back just as this transaction was effected.

Soon afterwards I took leave and came out into the street, instinctively feeling that doubt of any kind is to be solved only by action, as cowardice is to be cured only by effort. Moreover, it was more abundantly clear to me than ever (I was glad to find that compassion for this poor mother, for human suffering, made no difference) that there are cases in which human ties count nothing, in which the affections *must* be overridden, in which nothing personal must weigh for a moment. 'And over this barren ground,' thought I to myself with awe, 'how many weary persons have passed, Thou, Lord, alone knowest.'

But why, then, couldn't I make up my mind that Philip should go to-morrow? I scorned to waste a thought on the loss of his prospects, the loss of himself; nay, I believed that very possibly a decided step, any decided step, might be the making of him. I knew that suffering from inaction was many times

more harmful than suffering from sacrifice, and yet I hesitated. I was puzzled.

I was now quite near the Neva; the next turning would bring me out on the granite quays before their rows of palaces. It was late, and the streets were almost deserted. Sometimes I had walked at this hour from bridge to bridge without meeting anyone but a policeman, a gliding sledge, or a carriage at full gallop. Like all dwellers in Petersburg, I loved this stately promenade, with its ever-varying spectacle of river and sky; like many another, I brought to it some of my most intimate thoughts, and took away in exchange some of my most cherished impressions.

The barometer had fallen; it was now several degrees colder; a wind had risen, and had blown away all the sleet and mist. The wind was blowing right up the river from the sea, and smelt fresh and salt. As I stepped out from between high walls on to the clean wood-paved roadway, a film of cloud passed from the face of the almost full moon, which shed a hard bright light over the snow-covered, ice-bound river. I drew in the freshening air with all the force of my lungs, and crossed the road to the low parapet. Long chains of lamps dotted the still expanse like primroses on a field of grayish blue; shafts of purple and white streamed from the great electric globes before the Winter Palace, throwing up in relief the graceful bridges.

There was not a sound but the distant thud of horses' hoofs, and the roll of wheels, or the light footfall of some passer-by, or the tread of some gendarme. What a beautiful night! How peaceful, how serene, how cold! My pulses beat evenly, my thoughts ceased to struggle with one another, as I moved slowly along, my eyes resting on that blue grayness. The stillness of the night penetrated me, the freshness of the breeze invigorated me; I felt at last calm and happy, my agitation all rolled away, as the wind had rolled away the sleety mist.

Opposite, across the river, rose the familiar mass of the fortress itself, with its accompanying outlying buildings, a veritable town clustered about the beautiful golden spire of the fortress church. I looked at it, but without emotion other than the pleasure that this striking elegant feature of Petersburg never fails æsthetically to convey. It seemed, as it stood there in its proud and beautiful isolation, as remote and satisfying to the senses as the moon above or any other harmonious presence to which we are accustomed.

Had Vetrova really died, as was said, within those walls? and, because of this, were others to be doomed to-morrow? The city was bathed in an atmosphere of tragedy, as Madam M. had said. Never had I felt it more acutely than this wonderful night; but never had individual suffering in view of great ends

seemed to me more insignificant, never had it seemed more pathetically, beautifully *right!*

I paused, to walk on and pause again. By contrast, I suppose, Philip's case became quite clear to me, and I saw that he had no place in to-morrow's act—not if he went of his own will; not if he were to return triumphant, untouched; not under pressure; not through reason; not at all. He had no place. I even saw why till now I had been puzzled. Agitation, the ferment of the last few days, had brought him to the point of conceiving it possible, and this possibility tormented him—no further; the root of the matter was not in him. I saw, as a revelation, that nothing counts but a pure burning impulse; nothing in life, art, or love, but flame-like inspiration—absolute losing of one's self. Our first necessity is to be true to the possibilities which this capacity raises for us, to be true to the uttermost, and, if it doesn't exist, then to be true to ourselves as we are without it. Philip was without it; this was what had puzzled me; for him the great need was to be true to himself. No sooner had I perceived this than I left the moon and the sky and the silent expanse of river and the beauty of night over it and turned to go straight home. Immediately I felt very tired. I had been in and out of people's houses all day, and had covered many miles of pavement. But with the sensation of physical exhaustion, I felt a delicious accompanying inward satisfaction.

It was after midnight when I reached our block; the heavy street-doors were made fast, and I waited a long time ringing, curiously regarded by passers-by, till the sleepy wife of the Swiss came shiveringly, with her shawl over her head, to draw back the bolts. All the lights were out, and the close warmth on the staircase caused me to gasp, stumble, and sink down on the steps for a minute twice on my way up. As I fitted in my latchkey on the last landing, Philip opened the door. He took my *shuba* from me, and followed me into the dining-room, which was fairly lit from the street-lamps below.

'I was beginning to wonder where you were,' he said.

'I was walking about thinking of to-morrow. I think you ought not to go,' returned I decidedly.

'Why?'

'Chiefly because you don't want to. If you had wanted to in the bottom of your heart, you wouldn't have asked me.'

'Are *you* going?'

'No.'

He drummed with his fingers on the table.

'Good-night, then.'

'Good-night.'

I was moving away; I had got to the other door. A voice said: 'You despise me.' I felt a little ashamed of my coldness, but I was very tired and sleepy.

'Oh, Philip, I admire you! I think you are very honest. I think you are one of the most honest people I have met.'

At that moment I saw through the door the light from Anna Philipovna's room shining through the open ventilator into the corridor. Every word must be reaching her. I put my finger to my lips and vanished.

I breakfasted in my own room next morning, and appeared only at luncheon. I found Anna Philipovna alone in a gray stuff dress just measuring out the tea into the pot.

It was a lovely day; the sky was blue, lightly flecked with clouds, and the sun shone brightly into the room, making everything on the table glitter.

Anna Philipovna hurriedly put aside what she was doing and warmly kissed me on both cheeks, shaking hands at the same time. She bustled about and made such a fuss over me that I was not only astonished, but a little ashamed.

'Oh,' thought I, 'what's all this for?'

As soon as the servant had gone away, shutting the door behind her, Anna Philipovna burst out:

'Oh, Miss Foster, excuse me, but it is such a comfort to have you in the house! With you I feel perfectly safe; you are so wise and prudent for your age. I always say that the English and the Americans—but the English especially—are the most rational peoples in the world. Now that sentimental

Sophie Ivanovna insisted on going out; she said she couldn't rest in the house. But she won't get as far as the scene of action, I suppose; her heart will begin to palpitate on the way, and she will go into some shop and eat sweet cakes.'

Anna Philipovna turned on the tap of the steaming samovar with a disgusted jerk. I flushed up.

'The demonstration must have begun,' I said, looking at my watch, and I felt a choking sensation.

My companion did not reply; she was scrutinizing a dish of eggs which the servant had just brought in. The servant was making excuses.

Presently I got up and went to the window. How horrible was that feeling of one's heart in one's mouth!

'You can't eat anything? Well, neither can I,' observed Anna Philipovna, pushing away her porridge. 'I feel sorry for all those foolish young people, and shan't be easy again till it's all over. Thank God Philip hasn't gone!'

I was silent for a time, but afterwards said:

'Where has he gone, then?'

'To his institute.'

'What usually happens in such cases—at demonstrations?' I asked, after another pause.

'Well, there hasn't been one for a long time. Let me see, the last was under Alexander II. Oh, some are dispersed, others arrested, and in the mêlée the Cossacks kill some—ride them down, you know.

What horrors! I was out this morning as usual. I went up the Nevsky as far as the Kazan Cathedral, but I didn't see a sign of anything then. Perhaps, after all, the Isaac Cathedral will be the place; it is nearer the University. I met Madam V. at Romanoff's. She is a type, certainly. I asked her if she had heard anything. "I hear nothing else," she said. "What a fuss to make about a peasant! Burning was too good for her. May all who step outside their class meet the same fate!" I shall go out again this afternoon and try to learn something; but you will see one won't meet a soul who looks as if he knew or cared, and that no one could suspect for a moment that anything unusual had occurred. It's all over now, I dare say, and many a young fate sealed; these affairs don't occupy many minutes.'

Anna Philipovna, with a sigh, fetched a towel and began to wash up the tea glasses.

In the afternoon I went as usual to give a lesson, and climbed to the top of a tall house overlooking a wide thoroughfare. The old servant who opened the door seemed glad to see me, and stealthily wiping away a tear with the corner of her apron, knelt down to draw off my galoshes with some officiousness.

'Are the young ladies well?'

'Oh no—that is, yes. This way, please.'

She hobbled quickly along the passage, and threw

open the door of a cheerful room with a light wall-paper and two large windows. Sonia and Nadyezda, two very short and stout girls, came forward. Sonia looked pale, her colourless lips were as if glued together; she held out her hand. Nadyezda, whose eyelids were pink with weeping and her cheeks quivering, threw herself into my arms.

'Our heads ache; it will be very nice to have a lesson,' she said inconsequently.

I made no remark, but opening my book, 'Have you written anything?' I inquired.

Sonia produced a neat-looking exercise, which I read aloud, Nadyezda making me repeat two or three times every correction, and asking such ridiculous questions that at last her sister lost patience.

'How can you talk such nonsense!' she burst out in Russian; 'it's quite simple. Miss Foster told us three times that——'

'Oh, I can't help it, I can't!' returned Nadyezda, no longer able to control herself, and she began to sob convulsively.

I exchanged glances with Sonia, and walked to the window. The afternoon sun shone dazzlingly on the great burnished domes of the church opposite; far overhead white cloudlets floated serenely on; and down below, in the square, trams, men and women seemed to be crawling laboriously over the cobble-stones, the noise reaching me but faintly

through the double windows. I gazed a long time, absent-mindedly enough, till the bells striking the hour began to clang out from the cupolas below. Nadyezda had stopped crying when I turned round.

'It's my brother; we're so anxious about him,' she said faintly as I sat down near her again.

'He has gone to this demonstration; it's his idea; he got it up,' jerked out Sonia.

'And we've got to sit here at home waiting, and he may never come back,' continued the younger sister. 'Oh, if you knew how splendid he is, how brave, what an organizer! Oh no, he'll never, never come back; this is the second time he has come into collision with the police. They'll send him to Siberia, if they don't shut him up in the fortress. He's so clever; he is going to be a doctor. He came out first in his last exam.'

Sonia's gloomy looks confirmed all this.

'Oh,' said I, 'very likely he won't be taken at all; the boldest don't run the most danger.'

'Ah, but don't you see, the authorities will make his being concerned in this a pretext for getting rid of him, if not this time, then another.'

'We wouldn't have him stop at home on any account; we're very proud of him,' hastily put in Sonia. 'Last night he and a comrade were shut up across the passage there for hours arranging it all. You should have seen their faces glowing when they came out—ah, such noble hearts!'

Nadyezda was weeping again.

'Fancy! they didn't know the girl or her sister, but they heard about the case, the shameful story. They came here; their hearts were on fire. I saw them both, and they looked ready to kill.'

'Well,' said I, 'let's get on with the lesson.'

They agreed, but we didn't do very much; the case of Vetrova proved of too absorbing an interest.

'Tell me all about it from the beginning,' said I at length, putting down the books.

'It began among us *coursistes*, you know,' explained Sonia, 'and thence spread to the men's institutes; in fact, there has been a great deal of running in and out, and not much work done these last days. This is one of the hectographed proclamations.' She pulled a flimsy, crumpled paper from her pocket, and smoothed it out. 'We all got excited when we got these, and pretty soon two students went to the fortress and asked to see the doctor—for the relatives. He came at last, hummed and hawed, denied everything at first, then got very confused, and in the end admitted that something unusual *had* taken place—one of the politicals had been burned to death. "I attended her," he said; "I did all in order. She died after two days. I assure you, on my honour, that everything that could be done was done; but she was too horribly burned. Ah! don't ask me how it happened. I daren't say; I should lose my place. Don't say I

told you anything." "Well, what became of the body?" the students asked. The doctor replied that that was not his affair; they must ask the Governor. Fancy! these boys actually saw him, and asked him where the body was! He was very polite, but said that he really didn't know; his jurisdiction extended only to living bodies, dead ones were made over to the military Governor. It was ascertained that the burial-ground of the fortress was in the cemetery of the Preobrajensky Regiment. The students hurried off there, but in vain they jogged the custodian's memory. "There hasn't been any funeral here lately, and there hasn't been a woman buried here for one hundred and fifty years," he said. It transpired finally that the bodies of prisoners from the fortress were interred in a field, but where that field might be no one had the least idea. It would be well if the authorities would publish some statement or other, true or false; as it is, they have denied and asserted and contradicted one another by this time to such an extent that the simple truth is probably the last thing one would believe. We had a death Mass at our college, you know; I suppose every student came, and all the professors, who passed round a ministerial edict that no public Mass would be permitted. S., who tried to give a lecture as usual, had to give it up; he advised us nstead to keep our heads cool; that shows you——'

The door-bell rang. Nadyezda started to her feet.

'What are you going to do? For God's sake don't rush out,' said Sonia; 'if it is Sasha, you will annoy him, and if it isn't, you'll have to talk to the visitor.'

Nadyezda sat down again. It was not Sasha, and all that afternoon we waited with tense nerves for his expected ring; but he didn't come. At last the dinner hour approached, and I got up to go. The case of Vetrova was becoming as fantastic as a nightmare. Sonia promised to send me word if her brother returned safe and sound.

Down in the street I met B. hurrying along, not looking in the least where he was going. He is short-sighted. He turned and walked with me a little way. B. is a social democrat; he believes that the salvation of Russia lies with the working classes in the towns. He is a hard worker himself, but dreamy. As to externals, he is a handsome, kindly-looking man of about thirty-five, with blue eyes and a brown beard, and he usually wears a blue serge suit.

'How are you getting on?' he said.

'Very well, really. Have you any news?'

'Of what?'

'The students this morning.'

'Oh, the students. Yes, they have been dispersed, and some of them are locked up. There were some thousands in the cathedral.'

'I'm glad. It was a success, then?'

'Yes, for them. But I'm not glad, and I'll tell you why. The students are of no use to us; they are too young. It's all froth and excitement with them; we can't trust them, and more, they even do us harm. A student row is always followed by police raids. It's an excuse, and gives the police a chance of finding something. You see, *we* are everywhere; but, as it's their *idée fixe* that we're perverters of youth, it's among the students that they look for us.'

'I see.'

'Yes, and we take very good care not to let any students into any of our secrets. One of these nights the police might look in on me—one never knows; it was just at a time like this—well, I shouldn't care for——' muttered B. 'Miss Foster, will you do me a service?'

He fixed his bright frank eyes full on mine. He had a charming smile.

'What is it?'

'Would you mind taking care of something for me for a few days?'

'What?'

'Some memoranda—addresses, chiefly.'

'Is that all?'

'That's all.'

'Very well,' replied I slowly.

'Thank you so much. I'll send them round this evening. No. 23, isn't it? Just for a few days, you

know; and if you don't hear from me within a fortnight, burn them. It will mean that the police *did* come, and that I shan't want them any more.'

'Oh, I hope it won't be as bad as that.'

Indeed, looking at B.'s strong and supple figure, I couldn't imagine him shut up anywhere.

'Well, au revoir, then,' he said heartily.

'Au revoir.'

But I never did see B. again. The police came to his rooms about two o'clock next morning, and took him to the fortress. A few hours later the first post brought me his packet. That is another story, however.

I found dinner just coming up. There was an air of gaiety in the flat. The demonstration had been a great success, and, so far, no reprisals had followed. Even the police came in for a share of praise; owing, it was rumoured, to orders from headquarters, they had been as gentle as lambs.

'It was like this,' Philip explained, and even Anna Philipovna didn't interrupt him: 'about four thousand students, men and women, from the University and all the institutes, assembled at mid-day, as arranged, in Kazan Cathedral. They thronged into the nave, and completely filled it. One or two ladies who were making their devotions got into a terrible fluster. "Oh, but we haven't anything with you," they said; "we don't want to join in your Mass. What shall *we* do?" "The door is open, ladies,"

suggested old Professor Bekeloff. The old boy had come as a sort of buffer, in case anything went wrong. Nice of him, wasn't it? He had arranged with the priests, too, about the Mass; and he disappeared behind somewhere, and was arguing with them, I suppose. Anyhow, half an hour passed by, and not a sign of a priest. The students began to murmur, and it looked as if there was going to be a regular row, when Bekeloff came back to say they said they had an order from the Ministers, and must absolutely decline to say the office. "Cowards!" was hissed out. Bekeloff was indignant by this time himself. "Well, comrades, we won't go home without some sort of achievement. Let's all sing 'The Eternal Memory,'"* he called out. Immediately everyone started singing. The comrades say it was grand. They never heard anything like it in their lives; it was better than all the prayers in the world. The sound rose, and swelled and filled the building till it seemed as though it would twist and tear and break through stone and mortar and thrust the roof off. It was like some great heart throbbing and throbbing. No girl has ever had such a requiem, and no one who heard it will forget it to the last day of their lives. And what followed was wonderful —the crowd surging round the laurel wreaths and the flags inscribed "To the Martyr," tearing them in tiny shreds till everyone had a bit, tears streaming

* '*Vyechnaya Pamiat*,' an impressive hymn in the Russian funeral service.

down the fellows' faces. But Bekeloff was getting anxious. This crowd had to be led soberly out into the street again, to disperse and to get safely home. When the students had begun to pour in, not a policeman was to be seen but the usual one on duty on the Nevsky; when they began to pour out, they found a cordon of mounted police and military stretching right round the cathedral. These remained motionless, watching the students, and the students quietly went on coming out till they had filled all the space between. Then, before they knew exactly what was happening, the police had ridden in among them, and neatly divided them into four groups. One they drove on to the Nevsky, where it dispersed gradually; one they sent back into the colonnade for a time; and the third was quietly pushed inside the gates of a courtyard to the left, and let out at the rear. The fourth, which had a flag, went to the right, and marched on singing down Kazan Street. Well, these have nearly all got shut up. Some listened to their escort and slipped away; but the others, about eight hundred, they say, went marching on singing, right out ever so far to the Demidoff Quarter, and there at last they got driven into a police barrack, where they are supposed to be now; at least, nothing has been seen or heard of them since, except that the inspectors from their various institutes have been telephoned for. By the way, it was amusing. When I got to

the institute this morning, I found hardly anyone there, not only no students, but no inspectors or porters. "Why, where is everyone?" I asked, in the most innocent way, of a professor who was wandering uneasily about. He looked queer. The sneaks, not to lose sight of their charges, were actually attending the demonstration themselves!'

To celebrate this joyful occasion (as a reward for our reasonableness, perhaps) Anna Philipovna had ordered up a bottle of champagne; there was some little bustle of ceremony in drawing the cork, and I fancied that as her son put the glass to his lips, he winked at me over the brim. I am not sure; it may have been that he closed one eye, the better to concentrate every faculty on judging the wine.

Sophie Ivanovna, to my surprise, was subdued, even sad; she had not assisted at the demonstration, and I had an inward conviction that she *had* been eating sweet cakes. Moreover, she had omitted to curl her fringe as a tribute to the gloomy prognostications of the morning, and the consciousness of this seemed to depress her further; it certainly gave her an unusually limp appearance.

Anna Philipovna, on the contrary, was in almost boisterous good-humour, and she inveighed against the folly of the incarcerated students to her heart's content.

'I have no pity for them, not the slightest,' she declared with satisfaction many times; 'if harm

comes they have only themselves to blame. They succeeded as they had planned; for their own credit they should have quietly dispersed. I hear on good authority that the Tzar has taken up the case himself. A lady in high position persuaded one of the grand-dukes to speak to him. "Don't you think I know? I know everything," he answered, with tears in his eyes. "I wish to hear no more about it; I have ordered a thorough investigation, and I declare solemnly that not one of these young people, but *those who are to blame*, shall be punished."'

'Are you not sorry, then, *maman*, that you did not go to the demonstration yourself?' said Philip, in a quiet, distinct voice.

This remark certainly stabbed Anna Philipovna. She deserved it, and more; but I couldn't look at her at that moment, and I couldn't look at him. I knew as well as if I had that their eyes met like two swords, and that his did not fall. The revolt of years was in that quiet remark. But there are silent dramas which one doesn't care to approach too closely; there were signs that Philip's gentleness was not now always to be relied upon. Somehow I didn't enjoy Anna Philipovna's discomfiture.

'We know that "lady in high position,"' continued Philip. 'Wait. You will see who will be punished. However, let them do what they like; nobody can deny that this was one of the largest mass meetings since '69.'

This indeed was the one satisfactory and incontestable fact of the whole affair, and the first one that the panting Nadyezda triumphantly brought out when I drew her into my room next day. She had climbed the long flight to tell me that her darling Sasha was so far safe.

'He was with the ones who were shut up,' she said—'six hundred and fifty men and two hundred women. They had such fun; they had to wait hours and hours, you know, till their inspectors came, and then they were recognised, and wrote down their names and addresses. Meanwhile, they got awfully hungry, and they ordered in coffee and rolls from the street. It was a regular picnic. When the police saw all this bread being gobbled up and plenty of nice hot coffee, they couldn't stand being unsociable any longer, and begged for a share. "It's all very well for you," they said; "you didn't come along till mid-day, but we poor wretches have been shut up all round the neighbourhood waiting for you since six o'clock in the morning. And our horses, too: they haven't had anything to eat, either." So the students and the police became quite friendly together, and fed the horses with bread. Sasha says it was delightful when the inspectors came each to call off his own black sheep. A small group of nondescript-looking beings was left that didn't seem to belong anywhere. One was dressed like a gentleman, one like an official, one

like a peasant, and so on, but in each case not entirely in character. It was easy to see they were spies who had mixed in, and very sheepish they looked when everyone burst out laughing at them. One can't help laughing now, you know, though of course Sasha may be arrested yet. Anyhow, so far no one has been to our house after him. It is said that the Ministers can't make up their minds what to do. On the one hand, they have issued an edict which has been disobeyed, and, on the other hand, the Tzar told them that none of the students were to be punished *for this affair*. One of the Ministers, we know, will be eager to make an example, but the others hold off. Do try and find out something definite, won't you?'

Alas! this wasn't so easy as it sounded, but my greatest curiosity also was now to hear what the *authorities* were saying, what tone they took up. I decided to call on Zenaïde Alexandrovna Z. Zenaïde is just my age, and the wife of a high official who bears the title of General, but whose duties seem to be rather those of a policeman than of an officer. There is about him an atmosphere suggestive of secret services rendered and rewarded, a distinction which he and his wife seem to be always tacitly setting in a pleasant light. Their heirlooms are chiefly objects of price with flattering inscriptions from great personages. They do not display these (the Z's are not ostentatious); they refer to them

with modesty worthy the possessor of a Victoria Cross. Duty, faithfully performed, whatever its nature, is its own distinction, they seem to wish one to recognise. Zenaïde Alexandrovna in particular, one can see, is full of reverence for whatever appears mysterious in the family record. Duty to the Imperial family, and duty to her own and her husband's form, she admits, her entire creed.

I was fortunate enough to find this young and pretty lady at home. She had been at the opera the night before, and to a dance afterwards, and was now, perfectly refreshed by sound sleep, taking her coffee in a charming deshabille. While she completed her toilette, I passed into her boudoir, and, directed by her musical voice from the bedroom, amused myself in examining the odds and ends scattered about. There were some hundred photographs representing chiefly officers in uniform and ladies in ball dresses; innumerable *bonbonnières*, some very costly; French, Italian, and English novels and memoirs; and tortoise-shell and inlaid boxes of playing-cards. There was also a cupboard in some dark wood, carved, containing many beautiful, precious, and hideous eikons, before which a tiny red lamp burned; and there was a very clever full-length portrait in oils, on an easel, of an exceedingly plain-looking tall man in uniform—a portrait of her husband.

Meanwhile, she required my opinion through the

door of the looks of many of the persons represented in the photographs. As in nearly every case our tastes differed, this entailed warm discussions, much character-sketching, and many anecdotes, all very entertaining, followed, however, when she rejoined me, by gossip of an intimate, and, to my surprise, scandalous nature concerning the very same persons, most of them, it appeared, in her immediate circle. The picture, taken as a whole, thus presented, of a frivolous and corrupt society, gave me a pause of thought which was no doubt reflected in my face, and caused my companion to inquire naïvely:

'You are bored? You think all this the same everywhere—everywhere *civilized*—don't you?'

'No, I was thinking just the contrary,' I returned. 'I was thinking how odd it was to find you living so entirely apart from a delightful, fresh, and comparatively pure life which is pulsing all round you—at your very door perhaps—a life of vital interests——'

'Really? You mean——'

'I mean a forward life of reform, and——'

'Ah! but that is not society,' said Zenaïde Alexandrovna, with a smile.

The easel with her husband's portrait was just behind her; the life-like face of the tall man seemed to emphasize her remark.

'The society which concerns me is what I make for myself, and I prefer the freest and the freshest I can get. No doubt we talk at cross-purposes to

some extent, still, as human beings, and we are of the same age. Now, a society which smiles at such a case as that of Vetrova is distasteful to me, whereas one which it stirs——'

It seemed to me that I struck a discordant note in thus turning the conversation, and in pronouncing aloud this name. It astonished even me, the transition was so abrupt, and surely it was not fancy that a shadow passed over the pretty face *vis-à-vis*, and that the pretty voice was cold and indifferent as it replied:

'Ah yes! but, excuse me, how did you hear of this, Miss Foster?'

'Why,' replied I earnestly, 'I've heard of nothing else lately. There's a student in the house, who keeps me posted up, as you can imagine. Certainly, I don't believe all the students' stories, but it's a bad case, isn't it? I should like to know what society—your society—what your husband, for instance, says about it.'

'Yes, I see what you mean,' Zenaïde answered, almost eagerly, then laughing. 'I always suspected you were a little bit of a socialist, though you are so quiet. But, then, you are English, so it doesn't matter. In Russia socialists are *awful!* Well, *I* don't see why people of our class shouldn't interest themselves in what they like, but I think myself "the people" is a strange taste. But you needn't worry about that girl, really; she has caused enough trouble already.'

'Then what actually happened?'

'Oh, my husband says she was the greatest nuisance.' Zenaïde's well-shaped hand, with its diamond rings, played nervously with her chain. 'She upset the whole fortress, going on in that ridiculous manner. She must have been off her head. Imagine, she went on screaming and making such a fuss, that at last the Governor himself (a very nice man; we know him) actually went into her cell to see what it was all about. She said she was afraid of some man who had threatened to come in. She was afraid to be left alone. The Governor explained that it was her fancy and impossible. There is, you know, a guard, armed, at each end of every corridor, whose duty it is to see that nobody comes in or out. However, as she was on the point of being released, and she seemed so nervous and excitable, he ordered that she was to have a light in her room to read by. She must have poured the oil carefully over her clothes, they say, she was so frightfully burned. As to what is said about the procureur who examined her, my husband says it is absurd. Of course, she wouldn't enjoy being interrogated by him if she had anything to conceal. He is wonderfully clever; he would draw a secret from a stone. He delights in his profession, and, it is said, has caused more arrests—— However that may be, he's a valuable man, and the whole thing is most unpleasant for him. He was only doing his duty.'

This was all that Zenaïde Alexandrovna knew, or could tell. I think my interest genuinely surprised her, and she would have told more had she been able. And then she in her turn astonished me. She had heard nothing of the great demonstration, and was incredulous when I told her.

'Indeed, indeed, you must be mistaken, dear Miss Foster! Such a thing is not possible in these days; it would not be allowed. So many people meeting in broad daylight in the middle of Petersburg! Why, it would be those dreadful times all over again! Impossible, I assure you. You *must* be misinformed! Besides, I should have heard of it.'

She was so very certain on this point that I didn't care to dispute it with her; but I wondered, and I glanced maliciously at the plain, lined, long face behind her chair. It gave no sign of intelligence.

A silence fell between us. I was vaguely conscious of something gathering in her mind.

'You think me very frivolous,' she brought out suddenly, recalling me from my fit of abstraction; 'but I'm not content with being nothing else, I'm not indeed, and I assure you that I don't like or care to understand much that goes on in my circle. I have my own interests; I keep up my languages, and this season I'm learning Turkish, because it is possible that next year we may go to Constantinople. Of course, everyone who is anyone speaks French; but one can have much better fun if one understands

the language of a place. Then, music is really a serious occupation with me. But, of course, I like pretty things, and I don't think I could exist if I didn't feel well dressed. I have a constitutional aversion to poor, shabbily-dressed people. A drunken beggar frightened my mother just before I was born, perhaps that has something to do with it; and one day, when I was a child, just as my parents were getting out of their carriage, a man made a rush at father. I shall never forget it; it upset my mother dreadfully; she thought the man was a Nihilist; she was always in terror lest something should happen to father, he was so unpopular. Crowds make me nervous, and I'm afraid of peasants, really; isn't it silly? My husband always gets into a rage if anyone pushes against me in the street; he knows how nervous I am. Oh, I feel so young and full of life, I don't want anything sad to happen to me. I can't bear to think of it, or to think I shall ever be different to what I am, or grow old, or stop living. It's too horrible, too horrible. I ought to die young, I suppose, but I *can't* die—oh no, I can't, I can't!'

Zenaïde Alexandrovna, nervously playing with her chain, shuddered; there was a catch in her throat, and tears in her eyes. I drew her hands, with their glitter of diamonds, away into mine, and thought, 'You find that other girl's death agony *ridiculous!*'

'You are my age; don't you feel like that?' she said.

I shook my head, but could not speak for a moment, and, looking up vacantly, it seemed to me that her husband frowned at me from the canvas, checking me as much by his cold stare as if he were really present.

'There's nothing to be afraid of,' I murmured, 'nothing,' as I stroked the firm, smooth hands, so unlike the other girl's rough ones.

I thought that Zenaïde Alexandrovna was greatly to be pitied, that the case of Vetrova was happy compared to hers. I speculated about her as we sat thus. However, it was impossible that these moments should be prolonged. Very soon we kissed affectionately, said a few pleasant things to one another, and parted.

I returned home—not directly, however. The Peroffs lived near, and I thought I might as well go in and see them. Paul Alexeitch, distinguished, brilliant, assistant secretary to the Ministry of ——, always said something worth hearing when one had the good fortune to meet him; it occurred to me, with the pang of having missed something, that I had not had that good fortune for quite a long time.

The ladies of the family had exaggerated ideas of English recklessness — foolhardiness was probably the word they used among themselves. They told me so often of the anxious moments I caused them that I should certainly have long ceased seeing them

altogether had I not frequently observed that their curiosity outweighed their alarm. On this occasion they with bated breath spoke of the case of Vetrova, and their version struck me as quite the most sensational I had yet heard. They asked for my impressions, and, shaking their heads and lifting their eyebrows at my innocence, nevertheless listened with avidity to my colourless and artless tale. I was in the middle of it when some hangings at the further end of the room parted, and Paul Alexeitch himself came in with papers in his hand, dragging his feet noiselessly over the thick carpet.

'Paul! Paul!' his relatives cried, with a series of little screams, 'here's Miss Foster. She's talking in such an interesting way about Vetrova, come and listen at once.'

I felt just like a timid girl who is asked to play some difficult passage of music from memory; and I looked appealingly at Paul Alexeitch; but he, shaking hands, said with a slight frown:

'Go on, go on, Miss Foster.'

Peroff's word was law, and he could be sparing of words. With hands behind his back, and eyes fixed on the carpet, and with his habitual expression, that of a high official examining a petition, he listened gravely, attentively, while I chose my words. Once he said 'So?' The ladies' high-pitched voices interrupted, then ceased; they appeared to hang on my lips.

'And after sifting such evidence as we have,' I wound up, quite forgetting my timidity before Paul Alexeitch, 'the verdict seems to be simply that Vetrova was tortured—her mind and soul were tortured by her judge.'

'It is a sad, a very sad case,' said Peroff slowly; 'it should be made known to the whole world.'

The ladies gave little gasps, but remained silent.

'The procureur must be exclaiming at the injustice of Providence,' said I. 'He had done this thing dozens of times, and his victims made no cry; all at once a girl shrieks so loud as to wake Russia.'

'Wretched man!' said Peroff, with deep feeling.

I believe we saw at that moment the same scenes: the girl, defiant, insolent, sure that he will get nothing out of her; then a long struggle; all at once he, oh, so quietly, lays down a trump; she, surprised, makes an admission—another—another. Quietly, too, he jots them down. And he has other evidence, or guesses—why not? He wouldn't be here if he wasn't a match for girls like this one. Then suddenly, when she is all but worn out, he confronts her with a comrade's confession; it is—yes, it is his handwriting on the envelope. 'Now, then, isn't your game up?' says her judge with a sneer. 'Remember what you have said with your own lips.' And since at the beginning she didn't spare his vanity, so now he enjoys her agony. It was a fight hand to hand—cunning against courage, and in the moment of

victory the vanquished is not spared. After this victory hurried steps pass to and fro; there are whispered consultations; there are screams, it seems, which cannot be stopped—awful screams! They go on and on. Suddenly a silence. Surely the triumph is now complete enough; but the man's head falls on his breast; he still hears those screams, and he knows that he will not enjoy a victory again. He won, and somehow he is crushed.

Paul Alexeitch resumed his judicial air; he looked into my eyes coldly, deliberately.

'You mentioned,' he said, with a faintly jeering intonation, 'the word justice. You have found out, Miss Foster, that in Russia only the word exists; if one desires the thing, one is laughed at and called "the Englishman." The English are mad, as is well known. I have reason to believe,' he added in a lower tone, 'that you are correct in your surmises and interpretations; you are lucky in having such an object-lesson while you are here. This episode of Vetrova should be known to the whole world,' he added, raising his voice.

With studied coldness and gravity Paul Alexeitch shook hands and went away. The ladies looked after him with admiring glances and sighs which seemed to say: 'What a man! what an intellect!'

All was over; the excitement, the reaction, and even the interest in the case of Vetrova—it had

gradually died down. One was rather surprised if it were referred to. All was over, and everything was going on as before. Six hundred students had received a nominal punishment of three days' imprisonment, and had gaily taken their turns, fourteen at a time, excepting those, unfortunately, whose studies depended on their stipends, of which they were deprived, instead, for a year. Sonia's and Nadyezda's alarms as to their brother had temporarily subsided. Anna Philipovna was quite easy. The young people were now all absorbed in their summer examinations. Even Anna Mikhailovna was leaving for her distant home in an easier frame of mind. She had accomplished something for her son after all; he was to be sent to a less rigorous climate than A——. Yes, all appeared to be quiet, and the rumour that Vetrova's indiscretions had really led to numerous arrests among her friends contributed to the calm and avoidance of her name. Some who had wished to present themselves at the police-station to add their names to those of the six hundred now even regretted the demonstration, or, perhaps, seized this opportunity for excusing themselves for not having joined it; and a rumour that three persons had been shot for misdemeanour in the fortress scarcely aroused more than a pitying shrug. A cynical element appeared to triumph in spite of the fact that deep in his consciousness, everyone, in every class of society, knew and rejoiced that

a great sign had been given, a great event had taken place.

All was quiet. Summer winds called to everyone to leave the hot city. Sophie Ivanovna had rustled away some weeks ago; the *Z.*'s and the Peroffs had left; nearly all my acquaintances were gone, and I, too, was packing up. I had felt rather lonely these last days, and saw most of Anna Philipovna, who was more affectionate and admiring than ever. Philip was working hard for his examinations. He said even less than usual at meal-times, and did not listen to our conversation; but he was more alert in handing the bread, salt, and *qvass*. Anna Philipovna excused him for his absence of mind on the ground that his head was full of mathematics; but it seemed to me that pleasing thoughts unconnected with calculations came and went in his head. The day before I left Petersburg I was sure of it.

I was coming through the dining-room with an armful of my scattered belongings, and Philip was bending over the table, so busy with all sorts of papers spread out over it, and so happy apparently, smiling and humming to himself, that I paused to look at him, also smiling. He suddenly raised his head, and our eyes met, but his smile didn't die away; on the contrary, it challenged mine boldly. The same thought had flashed into both our minds: What had become of the depression expressed to me here on this very spot not so long ago—the evening

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before the demonstration? Why to-day this extraordinary smile, this happiness? 'Yes, yes,' his look seemed to say impatiently, 'if I had gone under then, I shouldn't now be experiencing this delicious feeling —I know that; and why, pray, after all, shouldn't I be happy?' What I was chiefly conscious of, however, was a certain air of manliness about him that hadn't particularly struck me before, so that if I didn't immediately reply to the ringing question, it was because I was caught—dominated by the newness of it. What I did say at last (I couldn't stand there staring for ever) was:

'You're all right, I think?'

'For the present,' he returned, indicating the papers; 'and I've got plans——' He stopped at that; evidently it wasn't part of his acquisition—it wasn't in the line of his new perception to detail them. 'You'll see, some day,' he added, with a smile even more brilliant.

This much was as evidently due to one who might be trusted to understand.

'What shall I see?' pursued I, still smiling.

He had bent down again over his papers, but now flung down his pencil and faced me upright.

'Look here,' he said slowly, 'I didn't come out very brightly over that Vetrova affair—oh no, I didn't—and I've been thinking about it. Well, we needn't trouble about my character; it's not cut out for action, that's a fact. But I'm not a log of

wood, either. I've got to pass my final, and then I'm going to set to work. And I'm not the only one, mind; a lot of fellows in my year think the same. You know what you said about suffering?' Philip coloured. 'I've been thinking I may do something besides that. There's plenty, for instance—plenty of things obscure—a poor fellow may try to understand.'

This last word he brought out as if he were afraid of it, but I liked him all the better for that.

'Yes, that's *your* line; you'll do that better than anyone. You're splendid at seeing things as they are,' I flashed out at him, 'and you'll show me.'

We each encountered the other's direct gaze at this.

'Ah! have patience,' he murmured; and then, with a grimace, 'I don't suppose I shall have much to show.'

At that I went gaily, gathering up my armful again, implying that there would certainly be more than I could ever expect to take in; and a remark, of which I caught only the ironical sense, followed me down the passage.

'He's right; he sees things wonderfully. I shouldn't be surprised if he were to go far,' I mused later; and as I dived into my trunk, it came over me with exhilaration that he had taken the most arduous and ungrateful task, after all.

* * * * *

The whole world did know of the case of Vetrova, and the world has forgotten. But it meant very much to Russia, and Russia remembers. A girl's agony sent a wave of generosity and enthusiasm throughout the empire, the culminating sign of which is a memento for many of the turning-point in their lives. Youth is sometimes cynical, but youth is always generous; it sometimes sleeps, but it waits only the awakening hand to be touched to fine issues.

ROUKOFF

I

In my charming room in Anna Philipovna's flat in St. Petersburg, every evening after dinner, I used to lie dreaming on the narrow red velvet couch pushed out sideways near the window. It was the recognised time for being quiet. The cook slumbered in her kitchen; Anna Philipovna nodded over fancy work in her drawing-room; Sophie Ivanovna had gone to sleep after reading a few pages of a French novel; and the only signs of activity proceeded from the scullery, where a poor woman, who came in regularly for this service, was mechanically washing up the plates and dishes. The rattle of these, which I could indistinctly hear, formed a regular accompaniment to my dreams, but was occasionally superseded by a noise—laughter or a scuffle—outside in the wide courtyard, into which my room looked.

On the floor at my side the English papers, brought at dinner-time by the post, lay strewn where I had

let them fall. I used to begin by attacking them voraciously, cutting short for this purpose the after-dinner talk which Anna Philipovna loved to prolong, but the somnolent atmosphere always conquered. Indeed, the hour before nine was so sacred to calm, so almost invariably free from domestic outbursts and foreign intrusion, that it appeared to me quite an image of guarded life in its security. The pleasure of feeling safe, while free in imagination to indulge one's capacity for dealing with possible complications, was exemplified for me in this hour.

Anna Philipovna's household was liable to be overset by sudden storms. She delighted in bustle and in dragging everyone within reach by main force into her affairs. This hour was then at once a sweet respite and a preparation.

However, on this particular evening—it was the thirteenth of December—I hadn't even time to fall into a reverie. Scarcely had my tired arms let fall the wide sheet of my newspaper when the wire of the front-door bell, which passed along the corridor outside my room, vibrated feebly. There was a faint tinkle. 'Axsenia won't move for *that*,' I said to myself. Axsenia was the cook. It was indeed after a long time, and only in response to repeated rings, that she at last got up and went shuffling and grumbling away. 'Now, if it should be someone for me,' I reflected, 'with what a bang she will throw open my door, and how disagreeable she will look!' But

Axsenia went back to the kitchen, and I could hear her going on grumbling there.

A short time elapsed, and then Anna Philipovna herself came bustling along the corridor, facetiously called the Nevsky, because it was narrow and, further, obstructed with boxes. Anna Philipovna tapped at my door, and burst into the room.

'I'm quite upset,' she declared, panting. 'May I come and talk to you for a few minutes? But I'm afraid I disturb——'

'Sit here, won't you?'

I cleared a place on the couch, and drew up the rocking-chair.

'Axsenia is beyond everything,' Anna Philipovna began. 'Did you hear how many times the bell rang? The girl will drive me distracted. If it weren't for some good qualities—— Well, and who do you suppose it was?'

I shook my head, gazing as if I saw for the first time those signs of her passionate, wilful nature—the high colour, and abundant hair turning gray, the thick eyebrows, the short neck, and stout figure.

'A young student,' she was saying. 'Axsenia is in such a temper, that I thought she had come for me out of spite; but I went to see, because Philip is so secretive about his comrades, and never lets me speak to them if he can help it. Well, this young fellow was dreadfully shabby, but he had nice manners.' Anna Philipovna smiled, and continued:

'He really had asked for me. He stammered out that he was on an errand of charity; a certain Roukoff—Pavel Alexandrovitch Roukoff—had given him my name as that of a benevolent person. Have you ever heard of him—of Roukoff?'

'No.'

'I thought you might have; you know so many people. Of course, *I* knew the name at once. I'll tell you the whole story. But I *am* disturbing you?'

She nodded at the scattered papers.

'Please go on.'

'Well, he's a blind man—such a sad case. The novelist Loukin wrote all about it in the *Russian Times* more than a year ago. I for one couldn't sleep after reading it. I took a cab the very next day, and went to see if I could do anything. Oh, if you had seen that lodging! I should like you to see it; you would then know what Russian vice and poverty look like in town—on the principle of seeing *everything*, you know. Well, it was the most disgusting, filthy place you can imagine, and Roukoff was the pearl in the dung-heap—such a distinguished appearance! such manners! He was in rags, and not very clean; so *Russian*, but well educated, and he spoke French and German perfectly. There was a grown-up daughter with him, in bad health, poor thing! and he stone-blind. What *could* they do? My heart *bled* for them. We had such an interesting conversation! Don't you think, Miss Foster,

that the most interesting occasions are always impromptu? I delight in these romantic episodes myself.'

'No doubt.'

'Well, I was going abroad next day, you know; I was packed up, and my ticket taken. In an ordinary way, of course, I should have given him something, and have gone off and have forgotten all about it; one does, you know.'

'Oh yes!'

'Well, but Roukoff mentioned the name of my late husband, and with such feeling. He said he was sure that Andrei Grigorovitch would help him; he said he *had* helped him some years ago. He spoke in such an appreciative way; he didn't know —he didn't know who I was, you see, and he didn't know that Andrei was dead. You can't think how touching it was in that miserable lodging. I cried all the way home; it brought my darling so vividly before me.' Anna Philipovna was silent a moment, as though with some inner struggle; then she broke out: 'Oh, Miss Foster, I love goodness; I adore it. I appreciate noble feelings and impulses —all that I have been taught to see is humane and generous—but I can't create all these things for myself. Alone, I am dry, barren, and now that I am left with only sad souvenirs, do you not see how *empty* my life has become? It is partly from this that when there is an occasion for generosity I

spring out to meet it. I clasp it, and I won't let it go. And I tell you all this because, though you are young, you are wise, and because somehow I have managed to spoil all my relations with other people; but with you the page of acquaintance is still unsoiled, and I wish to keep it so.'

Anna Philipovna paused, but I said nothing. I experienced a feeling of irritation—I didn't know why—just as if I didn't believe her, and yet I did believe her, and I felt very sorry for her. I felt that she really was an unhappy woman. Anna Philipovna passed her handkerchief over her perspiring face—the room seemed suddenly to have become very hot—and went on:

'Well, then Roukoff asked me about the widow—if she would be likely to help him—and I—I hardly knew what I was doing, I was so upset. I emptied my purse—all I had with me, twenty roubles; I explained confusedly that I was going abroad immediately, and I wasn't well off. The room seemed to go round. The poor man seemed upset, too; he thanked me with a shaking voice. The daughter had disappeared. I couldn't stay another minute. Coming away, I was rather frightened, the faces of the people on the stairs looked so evil; but I was uplifted in reflecting how untiringly my husband had always worked, even for such as they. His patients were from all classes; I should think every blind person in Petersburg—— Ah, you who know that

Andrei Grigorovitch's goodness is the inspiration of my life will understand——'

Anna Philipovna took out her handkerchief with a convulsive movement, and raised it to her eyes, while mine involuntarily turned to a framed etching on the wall behind the lamp—her husband's portrait, the same as the frontispiece to the two large volumes of his scientific works which she had lent me, and which lay below on my writing-table. His charm and worth never, I believe, needed these or the sympathetic memoir prefixed to attest them. Anna Philipovna was fond of exaggeration—was always in one extreme or another—but no one ever accused her of exaggerating the merits of Andrei Grigorovitch.

'No portrait did him justice,' said she, following my gaze, and putting away her handkerchief. 'If I tell you in detail what I did for Roukoff it isn't out of boastfulness, but that you may understand the impression he made on me and the sensation he gave me when he mentioned Andrei's name with such warmth. Twenty roubles were already more than I could afford—I had emptied my purse, and had to borrow from the Swiss here to pay my cab—and yet, after lying awake all night, I sent him thirty more roubles and a handsome dress for his daughter, which I had only worn once before I went into mourning. With the dress I sent a nearly new coat of my son's for himself. You see, Roukoff has

now sent this student to the widow of Andrei Grigorovitch, not to the unknown lady, whose name he never heard, of the summer before last. It seems he is in great distress again in another wretched lodging-house, with his son, a little boy, very sickly. I have sent Philip back with the student to see what ought to be done. Philip didn't like turning out, of course; he said he was just sitting down to his work, but that was an excuse. He is so unfeeling and useless; he really has no heart.' Anna Philipovna paused, as if for a contradiction; but I made none. 'I remember now he didn't like my giving his coat away without telling him,' she went on; 'that won't prepossess him in the poor old man's favour. How different *you* are! You have listened so sympathetically. I feel greatly relieved already by talking to you; you are so *good*.' Anna Philipovna cast down her eyes in a pensive way, and then, looking frankly up into my face, seized my hands impulsively, and said: 'Yes; with you I feel safe—so safe. I have done very foolish things in my life (oh, I have—I have, if you only knew), but I always feel in extenuation that if I had only had someone always by me like you, calm, prudent, reasonable, I should have been a different woman. See here, Miss Foster: when you see me on the point of doing anything foolish, tell me the truth. Don't be afraid; say simply one word, and I will stop. Yes, yes; I know. You are like *him*,' said

Anna Philipovna, turning to the portrait—'reasonable and with a good heart. You would have appreciated him; be my friend.'

'But, Anna Philipovna,' I protested, and I felt that I coloured up.

'Ah!' interrupted she, a hand raised, smiling and nodding, 'you are modest. Never mind, trust me; I know you—I *feel* you. In this affair of Roukoff, we will go hand in hand; we will share it, and then I shall be sure to do what is right.'

Anna Philipovna squeezed my hands, and without listening to a word, gave me two violent kisses, and hurried away out of the room. I heard her go into the kitchen and begin talking to Axsenia.

It may be that she really had done herself good, as she said; anyhow, she had dreadfully annoyed me. I walked up and down for a minute or two in quite a passion. 'What an extraordinary woman! What does she rush in like that for? Is it acting? Is it real emotion? Am I touched or not? Why should *I* be the safety-valve? As for this Roukoff, he is simply a nuisance; it's already an "affair," it seems. Of course, the whole thing means worry and bother—and dragging me in, and Philip, and my character. Calm, reasonable! why, I'm simply fuming. Anna Philipovna's friend! and those kisses!' I rubbed my cheek violently, and then catching myself doing so, burst out laughing. 'What rubbish!' I cried out loud, and then, seeing the

grave, sad face of Andrei Grigorovitch, as it were, watching me from the wall, I went up to it and said slowly, looking hard into the eyes, 'If it's all humbug, bringing *you* in is simply inexcusable. Since, however, she spoke in your name—— Ah, well, it will be a case of the blind leading the blind, Andrei Grigorovitch. But no,' I said, turning away, 'after all, I think it isn't humbug; I think it's simply that she's an impossible person.' I clasped my head, and stared down at the newspapers as if they recalled me from Bedlam.

II

Axsenia was late with the tea; it was one of her ways of asserting herself. I heard Philip let himself in and go to his room, stamping his feet and chafing his hands, just as his mother handed me the first glass. He came into the dining-room presently in high good-humour—which was rare with him—and with the expression, 'Well, here's a pretty to-do; now we *are* in for it!' which, as it savoured of the unregenerate student, was particularly irritating to Anna Philipovna. However, as she was eager for the result of the embassy, she merely said with a frown:

'Of course your hands are cold if you won't wear gloves.'

The hand which Philip held out for his tea was certainly very red. He began to laugh.

'It's all very well to talk about gloves, but what about my best coat which you gave to that imbecile? If I had a good coat instead of the rags I wear, I shouldn't want gloves, eh? Have you heard about this wonderful protégé of *maman*, mademoiselle? She gave him my coat, and left me shivering.'

Anna Philipovna shot me a significant look, but was confused all the same as she turned to her son.

'Come, no nonsense; that was more than a year ago. Well, and what did you find over there? Was it as the student said?'

'It's beyond everything. It's simply the vilest hole I've ever set foot in in my life. I can tell you, I was glad to get away. That student—he's a decent fellow, rather simple—told me that when he and his comrade first went there, the woman of the house set on them like a regular fury, and drove them out. They went back from compassion for the old man. Well, the place is so bad that the police don't go near it.'

'But you saw Roukoff?'

'Rather; and do you know his wretched little boy has typhus? The old man began complaining to me at once about the lodging; he says that at night the woman of the place lets all sorts of bad characters into his room to sleep on the floor. He says he's quite helpless, and with the child——'

'How frightful! What else?'

'He began a long tale about how they came from Siberia—Tomsk, that's where his home is—to try and get the boy into a Crown school here. Then he would be provided for, and could help the family later on. The others are girls. I said to him, "Your boy's got typhus, and there won't be any school for him if he stays in this beastly hole." Roukoff moaned, and groaned, and shuffled about, and said he didn't think the woman would let them go; there was money owing. He said they came fourth class from Tomsk, and the boy got typhus on the way, and when they got out at the station, he, Roukoff, fell down on the platform and was robbed of his passport and money, and that's why he had to come to this lodging, because it was the only place where he could get taken in without papers; but since his son was so ill he hadn't been able to get out to get new ones.'

'Well?'

'Well, the student agreed with me that if you are going to do anything, the first thing is to get them both away, but——'

A cynical expression came into Philip's face; he broke off, drank up his tea at one gulp, and handed up the glass for more.

'Well?' demanded Anna Philipovna sharply, tantalized by this ugly smile; 'well?'

'Oh, just this, *maman:* I, for my part, don't

think much of your protégé. I think he's an imbecile, or worse; however, of course that's not my affair.'

He twisted his moustache, and stopped.

Anna Philipovna fumbled with the tongs in the sugar-basin for a lump just the right size.

'What is it you told us the Irish say, Miss Foster, about forgiving, but not forgetting? My son neither forgives nor forgets; he is thinking of his coat.'

Philip never flushed, but his face turned so pale sometimes that his shock of light hair seemed to flame up from it. Just now, standing out above his black buttoned-up coat against the wainscot and dark eikon of Christ, it seemed a Vandyke come to life.

'You are right,' he replied; 'and I remember not only the coat, but the magnifying-glass.' He turned to me. 'My mother ran out into the street one day with my magnifying-glass, and gave it to a beggar. She forgot to tell me. I should have thought that anything else in the house would have done as well as my magnifying-glass for a beggar whom she saw for the first time.'

'You never used it,' said Anna Philipovna.

'It was my father's,' said Philip.

There was a silence. Anna Philipovna broke it.

'Your father was good to Roukoff, and you know that's why I want to help him.'

'My father gave to impostors sometimes, I dare

say; I know that his right hand didn't know what his left hand did.' Philip rose. 'I must get to work,' he said, moving towards the door.

'What are you in such a hurry for?' demanded his mother; 'you're not generally so industrious. There's a lot to talk over. You allow, at any rate, that the boy's got typhus. Then he ought to be in a hospital. Now *you* can do this very well. Go round to the hospitals to-morrow and beg a bed for this poor child, and then we must find a lodging for Roukoff near, and move them. Will you do that much?'

'Very well; but understand, I do it on your responsibility. *I* wash my hands of the affair.'

Philip disappeared.

'Tell them who you are, you know, and you'll be sure to get a bed,' his mother screamed after him. 'He adored his father; he won't do anything for me; that's a cross I must bear for my sins,' said Anna Philipovna piously. She pulled the empty glasses towards her, and began dipping them in the boiling water.

III

I went to read English next day with Miss Lopatine, the plucky editress of the enlightened monthly review *Northern Riches*. Her private apartments, together with the offices of the journal, occupied one floor of

a handsome building in a narrow and noisy street not far from the Nevsky. The quiet in the hall and on the stairs as soon as the outer door had closed, and the agreeable manner of the Swiss in attendance, produced on one a favourable impression, which was not dissipated when one stepped on the third floor into the *Northern Riches* office, where two or three clerks, men and women, were generally sitting quietly working by the light of small green-shaded lamps. I passed through this outer office, and into the editorial sanctum beyond, where we always sat, but there was no one there, and Miss Lopatine kept me waiting some time. Her burly servant Ivan brought me a cup of tea, and set in order her writing-table; brought fresh boxes of cigarettes and matches, and a fresh supply of sharpened pencils. Then I was alone. I looked once more round the familiar little room. As witnesses of a hopeless and arduous struggle, even the meagre furniture and the worn oilcloth had their charm. It welcomed one like a refreshing bath, this sad but pure atmosphere which clung round, as I fancied, even the files of old newspapers and the shabby chairs. I remembered, as something strange, that the first time I saw Miss Lopatine I thought she was dreadfully untidy, and that she smoked too much, but that now these things didn't seem to matter in the least. The sincerity of her smile through her diffidence held me, while I forgot everything else. Diffidence, sincerity! Were these the

secret of her charm? I didn't know, but I had a sense of well-being even in waiting for her alone in her room. I was musing upon this, indeed, while I waited, taking up one after another the day's papers, and looking out from time to time into the small dark yard, where the *dvorniks* were sweeping up the freshly-fallen snow. Miss Lopatine was not tall, and quite stout enough; she had, noticeably, dark wavy hair, which strayed into her eyes, and a sallow complexion. She spoke in a rapid, nervous manner, full of goodwill; while she spoke she kept her beautiful, questioning eyes on one's face. Her manner was eager and childlike, but her eyes contradicted her manner; they were sad. She came now into the room, hurriedly, apologetically. She wore a black skirt and a dark-blue tucked silk blouse, with lace at the throat. In her left hand she held a lighted cigarette. She took my hand, and then, blushing, kissed me.

'Do you mind if we don't read to-day? I've had a frightful night, or, rather, three frightful nights in succession. I've got up from bed to come to you. These English lessons are the only things that really distract me—that soothe me, take my mind off. I've been dressing. I went to bed at eleven this morning.'

She sat down and rested her head on her hands. She looked ill; her face was almost livid, and there were dark rims round her eyes.

'You're not fit. I'll go away. Your head aches.'

My respect prevented my fully expressing my solicitude, but she divined it, for, drawing me down again, she pleaded:

'No, no! Stay and talk. I do look ghastly, don't I? Put my suffering down to the credit of our censor, who has this time gone beyond—— Think! the review is due to appear to-morrow, and he has just had the assurance to tell me that he hasn't so much as looked at any of the articles. He was out amusing himself till four this morning. I was waiting at his house for him, and he's been out every day this week. It's too much—— But no, I'll strive to forget it. For Heaven's sake talk—talk of something else.'

To distract Miss Lopatine I told her about Roukoff, the first person who came into my head. I was astonished at my eloquence—at the things I said, as I had scarcely given him a thought since the night before. I talked beautifully, poetically, thinking to myself, 'Anna Philipovna wouldn't believe her own ears if she heard me at this moment.' But I'm very sure that emotion for Miss Lopatine, not for Roukoff. was really the inspiration of my touching story. I moved her as well as myself almost to tears. The name Loukin naturally arrested her attention.

'You must write to him,' she said; 'that's the first thing to do. Tell him of the present condition of his protégé, who is probably ashamed to apply to him again. Loukin knows me well. You are quite

welcome to use my name. Better write in French, and be sure to say you are an English lady.'

'Because we appreciate his work in England?'

'Because, to be candid, Russians pay more attention to foreign than to home opinion, and, as you may have discovered, especially respect the English.'

'And especially hate them. Well, thank you, I'll write.'

There ensued a silence.

Presently Miss Lopatine, restlessly moving about the objects on the table, said in a low voice in French:

'Do you know, you were right to tell me that story. I haven't listened with interest to such a one for ages. I haven't been able to interest myself in anything but the affairs of this office. But, ah! how I long to give myself up to the ordinary emotions of life! How I long to lay down my work and be as I was when I was a girl, open to every impulse, free to follow every feeling of my heart. This struggle for the life of my review—for the life of the *idea* of it—is killing, drying up everything else in me. Charity, almsgiving, the sufferings of others, love of nature, æsthetics—I've sacrificed them all! But it's no good, the struggle is too unequal; first my paper will die, strangled, and then I, who have put my whole strength in it, and cannot live without it.'

She pushed back her chair, got up hastily, and

began pacing about with her nervous walk. I stared at her, wide-eyed, alarmed, because she looked so ill, and because she had never spoken to me before like this, so directly.

'You *must* leave it for a time—to someone else. You must go away.'

'If I could!'

She paused a moment.

'*Can't* you leave it to someone else? Haven't you someone you can trust?'

'No, I can't leave my post; it is impossible,' she said almost inaudibly, as if thinking to herself, and she sat wearily down again.

I moved uneasily on my chair.

'Ah, how happy *you* are, for instance!' she rapidly, stammeringly breathed, plunging her eyes into mine, as if to seek some help that might lie in my soul for her. 'Young, without ties, fresh! I feel for you——'

There was a knock at the inner door leading to her apartments.

'Come in.'

Ivan appeared.

'I am engaged. I won't see anyone.'

'But——'

Ivan advanced to the table, and laid upon it a small card covered with writing. He respectfully sought to draw her attention to this. She pushed it away.

'I won't see anyone.'

Ivan was evidently reluctant to take back this answer. He stood still.

'I won't see anyone,' Miss Lopatine repeated; then passionately: 'Am I never to have a moment's peace?'

Ivan went away, but paused at the door. His mistress pushed the card from her without reading it, and turned resolutely to me.

'There, you see, my life isn't my own. Though they know how I hold to these hours, and that I have given strict orders that I am not to be disturbed, still, even Ivan, who is devoted—— What was I saying? Ah yes, that you are happy!' She emphasized the word.

'Happy!' cried I, and the dull roar of Petersburg outside sounded menacing with a personal menace. 'Ah, Miss Lopatine, what do you wish to hear me say?'

'Ah, but you have something! I know you must have,' she persisted, leaning nearer. 'I think of you as young and *confident*.'

'*You* have your paper,' I threw out.

'Yes; but don't you see that it's all over with it—it's in the last throes? One year, three years, the end is certain. I've played the game fairly, Heaven knows! I've accepted the conditions, and they don't give me air to breathe. I'll make one more effort; I'll get outside the preventive censorship if

it's humanly possible, and then—— Ah! how tired I am! Don't think I often complain like this; but the conditions—the conditions are so unfair. When I began this work I had a splendid constitution; I'd never had a day's illness, and now—— Oh! don't think I grudge my health if something good should come of it all; but see, I'm playing a *losing* game.'

A strange idea came into my head. I leaned back in my chair, and in my turn took up a match-box and played with it.

'If the conditions are unfair,' I said, 'why be bound by them—why not cheat? Your adversaries are abominable—be abominable. Then we shall see who will win. In love and in war who plays fair is certain to lose.'

Miss Lopatine's eyes glittered. She became so excited that she had difficulty in speaking.

'I have thought of it, often and often,' she said. 'People have said just that to me over and over again. They think me a fool, I know.'

'Then why don't you——'

'You said in *love*,' she answered in a low voice, looking down. 'In love, though I die for it, I must be open and show all my heart. Then, in this struggle—in everything—won't it be the same? Some people—I know some who don't even risk anything; they manage by bribes. If *I*—then *I* should be on that level. I have never given a rouble yet, and I am not going to. I won't begin.'

'My dear Olga (forgive my familiarity),' I cried with delight, 'certainly you will never do it. There are those, I know, who can only fight in the open; you are one of them. You will be always conquered, but always victorious.'

The office clock made a rumbling noise and struck six. We both jumped up rather confused.

'Goodness, how disgracefully late!' she said. While I scrambled to get into my things, Miss Lopatine went on: 'What strange talks we have! not a word of English to-day. But there's something in you that impels me——'

She rubbed some tears from her eyes.

'And you'—I took her up lightly—'why do *you* raise in me emotions? and why, tell me, is this Russian atmosphere charged with feeling, not only here, but wherever I go? It seems as if no one can talk calmly.'

'You meet living, suffering beings. All we intelligent Russians suffer horribly,' she said; 'in some mysterious way you are tuned up to this note; it touches you, and you evoke it. Pardon me for my thoughtlessness. No, decidedly; if you feel all this, you cannot be happy.'

Miss Lopatine conducted me across the now deserted, unlit office to the outer door. We parted lingeringly, reluctantly.

'Write to Loukin,' she called after me.

Once in the street, I dashed through the slush

and mud, darted in front of waggons and carriages, crossed at top-speed the hustling Nevsky, bright as day, and ran on in the darker thoroughfares all the way home.

IV

Philip did not return to dinner, which threw our common tyrant, Axsenia, into fresh sulks. She said she didn't see why, after preparing the meal from ten in the morning, she should have the further trouble of keeping it warm. Axsenia did what she liked in the household, that was the truth; she was the only person whose temper Anna Philipovna really feared, and her attempts to soothe her infuriated handmaid were—coming from her—sometimes exceedingly comic. Axsenia was the newest type of Russian servant, a *real* democrat, as we used to say, smiling.

Sophie Ivanovna, the good lady from Moscow, who inhabited the room next mine, was, however, present, and took more than her share in the conversation, which related entirely to Roukoff, and which I found very dull. She was genuinely affected by Anna Philipovna's account, and gave her, with tears, three roubles for him, half-way through dinner. She and Anna Philipovna worked one another up, speaking in heartrending accents of suffering, poverty, despair, social evils generally, and impending retri-

bution. Anna Philipovna, however, paused in her remarks to examine each dish carefully, and to assure us, when the door was closed, that Axsenia had cooked everything disgracefully, on purpose.

To Sophie Ivanovna's mind the story of Roukoff was only one more proof of the stony-heartedness and cynicism of St. Petersburg people. Such a thing, she said, could never have happened in Moscow. She wound up by appealing to me for statistics of deaths by starvation in London, and roundly asserted, stony-heartedness notwithstanding, that no death by hunger *could* take place in any town in Russia, owing to the sublime brotherly feeling, greater than class or creed, in Russian hearts. I had often heard this before—from Russians, but had this very week seen three people fall down from inanition in the streets, one of whom died. But, of course, that such a question could be seriously discussed was refreshing to a Londoner.

We were rising, complacently, unconvinced, when Philip came in. His first words—'I've had a dance!' —led us all to immediately sit down, and pass round again the dried fruits, while, over his soup, he related how he had spent pretty well the whole day between hospitals, lodgings, and Roukoff. The hospitals, it seemed, were unusually full; it was with great difficulty that he at last secured the promise of a bed for the day after to-morrow. Lodgings near the particular hospital which afforded

this haven were equally hard to seek; but one had at last been found. The insuperable difficulty was with Roukoff himself. He absolutely refused to let his child be moved, at first with tears and afterwards angrily. He said that he couldn't let him out of his sight, even next door; he hadn't brought him all the way from Tomsk to lose him at perhaps his last gasp.

'I got so furious with the man,' said Philip, 'I nearly left him then and there; but that student—who really is the softest noodle—well, he undertook to find a good lodging for them both together somewhere. Think what a fool I felt! I'd been running about all day bothering doctors, making myself a frightful nuisance, and at last I got what I wanted—for what? To have to go next day and say, "Oh, I'm very sorry, but I didn't want it after all."'

'They'll be glad enough to have the bed back,' remarked Anna Philipovna.

'*I* think it's very touching, this poor old man's affection for his child, far from home, all alone in a strange town,' said Sophie Ivanovna, with a severe expression.

'H'm!' grunted Philip.

'No—o, Roukoff isn't in Petersburg for the first time, dear Sophie Ivanovna,' put in his mother.

'Ah, well, say what you like, it's affecting. Is the child in a *very* dangerous state?'

'I can't make out. He's shivering all over, and can't take his food.'

'So the student's going to find a lodging?' resumed Anna Philipovna.

'He thinks he can, at a comrade's—a very decent place, across the river, on the Petersburg side.'

'Well,' went on Anna Philipovna, 'I must say I'm rather surprised at Roukoff, after all the trouble you've taken; but no doubt he fears the child will pine away without him.'

'I don't think Roukoff will pine away,' her son answered her, with a laugh. 'I wish I were as hearty!'

Anna Philipovna looked daggers at him, but made haste to help him to the next course.

'Miss Foster is going to write to Loukin—a friend has advised her,' she said.

'Yes; and, by the way, I'll go and do it.'

I got up.

'Axsenia shall leave it at the door when she goes marketing the first thing in the morning,' her mistress declared. 'Loukin lives quite near; she shall give it into his own hands if possible. I won't trust the post. I'm resolved to do all I can in this affair.'

I duly wrote the note, and Axsenia duly delivered it into the care of the novelist's servant; but the days went by and no answer came, upon which Anna Philipovna commented much. It was a convenient text for sermons upon the bad manners of literary people.

Meanwhile Roukoff and his son had been moved, not without much grumbling on the father's part, into the respectable, clean, and airy lodging of which the student had spoken. Philip was despatched there several times with nourishing food, and reported that the boy seemed better, was attended by the parish doctor, and that Roukoff himself appeared to be ruminating all sorts of plans. One of these was the old original one of getting the child a place in a Crown school, for which he had brought him to Petersburg; and this he thought might be accomplished through the intervention of some senator, Roukoff, it appears, having been at one time employed in the Senate, from which he therefore also hoped to be able to secure a pension.

Anna Philipovna was immediately sure that I must be acquainted with one or more of this august body; and when I shook my head in energetic protest, she was equally certain that I knew dozens who were.

'Why, what about a certain orator whom you heard privately the other night? Isn't he the most distinguished ornament of the Senate? And what is there he can't do, I should like to know, if he has a mind? We used to be in the same society in our young days.'

Anna Philipovna sighed rather sentimentally, and this from her was somehow quite effective.

Sophie Ivanovna, all palpitating, and breathing round her the scent with which she was everlastingly

perfumed, seemed only waiting for a favourable reply to embrace me. Philip looked up from his plate curiously.

'I dare say I could interest some people I know. It would rest with them to interest *him* if they saw fit,' I said slowly.

'How old is the child, Philip Andreitch?'

'He looks about ten.'

'And what was Roukoff's profession before he went blind?'

'Advocate. It is about twenty years since he served in the Senate, before he went to Siberia.'

'Yes. Write down all the particulars for Miss Foster to give her friends. You lift a weight from my heart.'

Anna Philipovna smiled graciously at me.

'Well, I'll do what I can,' I answered; 'but it will be really odd if, after all, he should be helped through me, for, do you know, to be candid, I haven't the smallest feeling for this poor man. His story leaves me quite cold.'

I stared up at the ceiling in perplexity, which did not prevent my being aware that Sophie Ivanovna was raising her hands to heaven, and that Philip was clapping his softly. Anna Philipovna frowned at him till her eyebrows met. She grew very red. However, I persisted, as if the words were being drawn out of me:

'No, it's odd, it's horrid! I don't understand,

but I haven't any real feeling. I'm sorry he's poor and blind—I'm sorry for everyone like that, but only vaguely. I shan't sleep any the less well to-night.'

'You surprise me, Miss Foster,' Anna Philipovna took me up, speaking very fast; 'I didn't expect this from you. I find it—well, not at all *English*.'

'I'm sorry. I should like to feel something, but I feel dead—dull here, like a piece of wood,' I returned softly, touching my heart.

Philip got up, and began to walk excitedly about the room.

'What are you doing? Aren't you going to finish your dinner?' demanded his mother in an annoyed tone.

'No, thank you. Miss Foster is better than dessert any day. Mademoiselle, permit me to tell you that I am your very humble servant.'

He clicked his heels together and bowed, grinning. He had at that moment an extraordinary resemblance to the Mephisto, the Spirit of Evil, that *tour de force* of the sculptor Antokolsky in 'The Hermitage' which sits leaning forward, everlastingly grinning and stroking its goat's beard with its long nervous fingers. I don't attribute any malicious thought to Philip, far from it; I merely record a fleeting impression, one shared, I think, by his mother, for as she stared at his mocking face her own grew purple, as if there were evoked for her some poisonous recollection almost more than she could bear.

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'Idiot!' she shrieked out with fury.

Sophia Ivanovna looked at each of us in turn, as if she felt that her good manners were thrown away on people who seemed to have suddenly lost all sense of propriety.

'Well, joy go with you. I *am* curious to see what you will do with this dear Roukoff. Au revoir.'

Philip included us all in a low bow, and went off chuckling.

'Good for nothing!' shouted Anna Philipovna.

She took some little while to recover herself, but finally, turning to me, said in a mild tone:

'By the way, you haven't had an answer from Loukin yet, have you?'

'No.'

'It is really curious. The servant told Axsenia that the novelist was in bed, and should have the note directly he woke. Do you think you had better write again?'

'Oh no,' said I quickly; 'he's had his chance,' and I in my turn got up and went away.

I already felt that I was losing my way in the moral mist which, thickest, doubtless, round this wretched Roukoff, was gradually wreathing in between us all.

V

Though the misery of Roukoff didn't touch me, I was greatly disturbed because it didn't; and I spent a more or less uncomfortable night on that account. It seemed that there was something wanting in me. I lay awake, with just the wall between us, envying Sophie Ivanovna her warm and easily-moved heart, annoyed to find that I could envy such a very silly person. It was borne in upon me that I really must go and interest the Zaroubins. At the same time it didn't prepossess me in Roukoff's favour, as Anna Philipovna would have said, that I was forced to do this. I felt his power and resented it already. Did he know, I wonder, in some mysterious way that night, as I lay feverishly awake on his account, that yet another fly had entered struggling into his vast web? I don't know—I can't tell, of course, what intuitions such a genius might have; but no doubt he was enjoying in a general way the thought that his web was spread, and that to replenish his larder he had merely to sit still. There are always plenty of flies in the world.

In passing on Roukoff to the Zaroubins, I knew perfectly well that I was sowing in fruitful soil. Amélie Adrianovna Zaroubin simply lived to do good to others; as she said, '*l'amélioration de l'âme humaine*' was her first object in life. Certainly her

efforts struck one as roundabout, even feeble; but one respected the elevation and piety of her sentiments and the purity of her mind. One had an even greater respect for Piotr Petrovitch, her husband, the incarnation of justice, who, with the charm of Russian seigneur, recalled the best type of English magistrate. So it was really painful to feel that in exciting Amél' Adrian's sympathies I was doing them both a bad turn. Amél' Adrian's enthusiasms were in every way expensive; she was one of those people for whom a plunge into reality means relapse. Her moral system was weakened, not braced, by shocks. In short, it was desirable to restrain rather than to encourage her emotional expansiveness, and yet here I was coming to her with a pitiful tale!

It happened that I took a seat in the tram next to an acquaintance—a representative of the latest phase of the Russian social democratic movement—who spent her whole energies for others. A tram was not the place to refer to this, so I spoke of Roukoff. I explained that he was not one of *her* people.

'Well, then,' she said, 'you had better go to Madam Zaroubin; she won't have anything to do with *our* sort, but she's a good woman, so isn't she just made for such a case? If, however, she can't or won't help, come back to me. One word of warning!' She squeezed my arm and whispered in English in my ear: 'Be sure it isn't a police trap!'

My street corner was reached.

'All right,' I replied; 'thanks.' I got out. 'That's what comes of the unnatural tension these advanced people work under,' I said to myself; 'the anxiety must be killing. They see a spectre at every window —a policeman behind every lamp-post. Only frivolous people really enjoy themselves in Petersburg.'

As if to confirm my thought, and since encounters seldom come singly, a minute later, as I was crossing the bridge by the Summer Garden, a charming little voice called after me:

'Miss Foster, stop a minute, please! Where are you off to so fast?' and a charming little person in a fashionable coat, with her coquettish face sunk in a wonderful mink collar that rose behind her ears, came tripping after me, followed by a tall and young maid. 'How *can* you walk so fast? I should have known you were English a mile off. Well, and what's it all about? I'm sure it's something interesting,' she lisped out.

'I'm going to Amél' Adrian',' I said, smiling, 'on an errand of charity.'

The young girl made a wry face.

'What a bore! Now, please don't go and fill up her head with anything serious when I want her to give parties. I've just come from my dressmaker, Princess *Z.*, and she showed me a dream for Amél' Adrian'. Gauze wings—for the poetical turn of her mind, but folded down for her delicate health, black of course, but *so* light—evening! These symbolical

dresses are the rage. Isn't the Princess clever? Now, *there's* a woman I admire. It looks like Amél' Adrian's going into society, doesn't it, after trailing about in a dressing-gown all these years? And I believe it's the dress that has done it.'

Natasha looked at me roguishly, her eyes half-closed, from behind her muff.

'Oh, don't be afraid,' I returned, also smiling; 'mine will be an affair of half an hour. But,' my expression changing as I realized an opportunity for making propaganda for Roukoff, 'it's very sad, Natasha, really. There's a blind man, awfully poor, with a sick child who——'

'How tiresome!' quickly interrupted the pretty girl. 'You'll set Amél' Adrian' right off, I know you will; she adores all those horrors. She'll put on her new dress at once, and go out in it to talk about them.'

Natasha looked carelessly round her in the street at her maid, and then clasped her hands over her muff, and drew the corners of her lips down, casting up her eyes. I seemed to see Amél' Adrian' before me. I couldn't help laughing.

'Well, *au revoir;* good luck,' she went on, settling her veil. 'I see you like my collar—a beauty, isn't it? But we mustn't stand talking in the street. Have you fallen in love with the handsome young man in your house yet? You never come to see me. *Do* come.'

She rattled off this at a great rate in her babyish lisp, and tripped away, looking down with conscious pride between the high lappets of her fur. I walked on even faster, and arrived at the *Z*aroubins' at the best possible moment.

Amél' Adrian' lived like an invalid. She suffered from a chronic malady of the nerves. At half an hour after mid-day she had just bathed, dressed, and breakfasted, and my arrival was opportune for directing her thoughts into a channel for the day. As I generally went to the *Z*aroubins' in the evening, she guessed from my unexpected visit that something interesting had happened before I opened my mouth, and the very way in which she patted down a place beside her on the couch and arranged a cushion committed me. The room was darkened and suggested confidences, and she herself was to-day in her most receptive mood, almost clairvoyant; one might have thought, indeed, that she had risen from dreaming what I was about to say and listened merely from politeness, so sympathetic was she. Her comprehension and enthusiasm absolutely caused her to take the words from my mouth and finish the touching recital herself. She lost no time in sketching a plan of campaign.

'I will order the carriage,' said she. 'We will go at once to the Princess B., Countess S., and Madam C. You shall tell them what you have told me, and between us all it will be strange if something

can't be arranged. It is dreadful—dreadful to think that such things can be in the heart of Petersburg! It is a scandal!'

Half-way to the bell she paused, ran to the curtains into her husband's room, and, putting her head through, called on one note:

'Piotr! Come at once, and listen to a terrible, terrible story that Miss Foster is telling me—a dreadful, terrible story!'

'Presently, Amélitchka, presently,' returned a steady voice, and there was a rustling as of pages turned over.

Zaroubin had long ago devoted all his eloquence, his discrimination, his innate love of justice, the qualities of his character and his mind, to literature. He was engaged, I knew, upon a critical work of magnitude; perhaps, since he did all his work at home, he was weighing a verdict or even rendering a tribute at this very moment. I half jumped up, annoyed, ashamed somehow that Amél' Adrian' should bother him. She caught my involuntary anxiety.

'Oh, it's nothing. I disturb Piotr whenever I can; he leads too sedentary a life,' she assured me, coming back.

She sank on the couch, put her feet up, held a smelling-bottle to her nostrils, and lay back without saying another word, as if already exhausted. I sat looking at her.

In another minute Piotr Petrovitch came in humming a tune. He bent down and kissed his wife's hand. His friends called him 'the angel,' and I could never see him without thinking of this. He was a rather stout, elderly angel, with an expression, aided by gold-rimmed spectacles, at once benevolent and dignified. His manner betrayed at all times a constant sense of responsibility. It seemed to weigh heavily upon him, even in shaking hands. But in spite of one's constant perception of this, perhaps partly because of it, everyone loved Piotr Petrovitch. His stout, sensibly-clothed figure gave a character of importance—of solidity—to any society in which he was present; when he turned away, some involuntarily sighed.

Amél' Adrian', holding her husband's hand, sat up, and plunged incoherently into the story of Roukoff. She appealed to me for corroboration as she went along, and wound up: 'We are going out at once; I have ordered the carriage,' forgetting that she had not done so.

Piotr Petrovitch appeared to be impartially considering some object across the room, and waved his hand in the air as if addressing a large audience.

'Will it not be better to lunch as usual, Amélitchka? During luncheon Miss Foster will perhaps kindly tell us the story again. A few questions occur to me.'

'Luncheon is served,' said at that moment the subdued voice of Ivan in the doorway.

We passed into the dining-room. Piotr Petrovitch listened attentively to a sobered recital. He ate moderately, but seemed to enjoy what he ate. I decided, while replying to his courteous inquiries, that a clear conscience was the sauce with which he flavoured his laborious life, and that it sufficed.

'Roukoff! H'm—odd! How do you spell it?' he said suddenly.

'R-o-u-k-o-f-f,' I answered, surprised.

'Ivan, bring me the third volume from the far end of the slide on the right-hand side of my writing-table.'

The book was brought. Piotr Petrovitch turned the leaves, stopping to consult the slip of data written out for me by Philip.

'If this is correct,' he said, laying his hand on it, 'this man Pavel Alexandrovitch Roukoff is brother to the Governor of A.'

We were all astonishment and interest, especially Amél' Adrian', who was of a romantic turn of mind.

'Now, Miss Foster,' continued Piotr Petrovitch, 'this seems to be, as your friends say, a deserving case. But I advise them to make inquiries why the brother, who is a man of considerable fortune, doesn't assist it; secondly, why Roukoff left his position at the Senate, exactly what this position was, and in what years he held it. If the answers to these questions are satisfactory, I shall have much pleasure in recommending Roukoff to my

friend N., the senator, as regards the pension he desires. As regards the vacancy in a Crown school, I fear that the boy is already too old. The authorities prefer to educate children from the very beginning. I can, however, give you a letter to Monsieur Lopatine, an excellent man, who, I believe, reserves several places in his school for charitable purposes. You have heard of his school, of course?'

'Lopatine, the father of the editor of——'

'That's the relationship.'

I explained that I was going to read with Miss Lopatine in the afternoon, and would speak to her.

This judicial way of disposing of the affair was not agreeable to the enthusiastic temperament of Amél' Adrian', whose heart was set on her charitable errand. She resigned herself with a good grace, though, promising to speak immediately to the secretary of a society for distributing bottles of milk gratis. She had the fixed idea that Roukoff and his child were literally starving. I thanked her most warmly, but I spoke with moderation to Piotr Petrovitch, instinctively feeling that every word employed conveyed to him its exact sense, no more and no less, a perception which in Petersburg was a pleasure in itself, I reflected, as I took my way to the office of *Northern Riches*.

VI

Miss Lopatine was waiting for me this time, and very much on the alert. She looked almost well, but the flush in her cheeks was from anger. She showed me almost at once a proof of one of the articles for her review, on the second page of which, in the space at the end of a paragraph, was scrawled '400 r.'

'What do you think of that?' she said.

I didn't know what to think of it.

'This is what the censor has the impudence to return to me, and not a single erasure; every syllable passed this time *after* the day of issue. I don't believe he's looked at a word. The question is, Does he use my proofs for doing his sums? Is this the memoranda of his difficulties, or is it the price for his doing his duty?'

'What do you mean to say?'

'I mean to say that he is a rascal. My friends think that he means to go on with this game till he gets four hundred roubles, but it *may* mean that he *owes* that sum, and is absorbed by his pecuniary situation. I know that figures obsess *my* brain sometimes,' said poor Miss Lopatine, with a sigh. 'However, I shan't take any notice. I shan't put down a copeck, and if he doesn't behave like an honest man, I shall badger his life out till he'll be

glad to pay me four hundred roubles to keep *me* quiet, then we shall see.' She rumpled up a pile of correspondence. 'Some of my worries,' she smiled. 'However, I'm not going to worry *you*, but I thought you would be interested. The young rascal is the relation of the wife of ——; that's how he got the place. He can't spell Russian; I know that.'

'The wife of that devil?'

Miss Lopatine nodded twice.

'You see, that's how we do things in Petersburg. Oh, by the way, a coincidence. While you were here the other afternoon your protégé Roukoff was outside. You remember Ivan brought a card in? Here it is.' She rummaged about. 'Well, it doesn't seem to be here, after all. No matter; it was really he, begging to see the editor of *Northern Riches* on urgent business.'

'Good gracious!'

'Yes; I wonder what he wanted. I've been so busy I forgot all about it. He didn't come again. How is he getting on? Did you write to Loukin?'

'Yes, and he hasn't answered.'

Miss Lopatine was highly indignant.

'Leave him to me,' she said.

Her contemptuous expression convinced me that I might with confidence.

'And now I want to bother your father,' I proceeded, relating my visit to the *Z*aroubins.

Miss Lopatine warmly assented, asking:

'Did you mention to them that you had written to Loukin and had received no answer?'

'Yes.'

'And what did Piotr Petrovitch say?'

'He looked down, and said nothing.'

'If Loukin were to hear that, he wouldn't forgive himself; he would think he had made a big mistake,' said she. 'I'll tell him. Behold us Petersburgians!'

She sighed.

'Was that one of them who came out as I came in? She had a face to remember. What was she upset about?'

'Ah!' Miss Lopatine paused, as if to seek a particular path in the wide field thus presented to remembrance, and brought out suddenly: '*You* know Davidoff, the advocate?'

'Yes.'

'Well, take care. He's done something revolting. He must be heartless.'

'I don't know about Davidoff's heart, but he has an intellect which I should have thought would have prevented——'

'It didn't. He was at a loss; that's the point. The intellect is on a grand scale, and the heart is like a shrivelled bean.'

'It may be so. The Davidoffs have been very kind to me, anyhow. I never thought about their hearts before, but I will to-night certainly; they asked me to come to dinner.'

'Tell them about Roukoff,' said Miss Lopatine, smiling.

We began our reading.

Now, it wasn't in human nature not to wonder under what circumstances Davidoff had shown himself so revolting, and it was with more than usual interest that I entered this interesting man's house. He lived in some splendour in what I thought the nicest part of Petersburg, with his aunt, an old maiden lady with pronounced Jewish features and vivacious but polished manners, quite as much an original as he was. Between them I felt like Alice in Wonderland between the mock turtle and the gryphon, they towered over me so on either side—intellectually towered over me, for I was quite half a head taller than the nephew, and the aunt was a tiny creature. I always, indeed, felt like a good little girl, intelligent and anxious to learn, at the Davidoffs'. They petted me, and gave me sugar-plums, and looked across at one another as I slowly took them. They really did give me sugar-plums; they always had a box brought in and put on a little table between us after dinner, and they pointed out to me the best ones. It was distressing to have to consider whether Davidoff, who smiled so while I ate sugar-plums, really had a heart like a shrivelled bean.

There came to my mind as I walked along to his house all that I had heard said of him. He was the

ablest advocate at the Petersburg Bar on the civil side; his juniors adored him. He was very rich; he was very mean; he was an ancient Roman; he was called 'the Englishman'; all his clothes were made in England; he read English newspapers, and didn't read Russian ones; he wore dog-skin gloves of a brick-red colour, and kept them on in drawing-rooms when remonstrated with by ladies of the highest society; he said Russian hands were dirty; he was an Anglo-maniac; he never drove anywhere; he walked very fast, and, to complete the inventory, he had a heart like a shrivelled bean. His aunt was eccentric, but kind; they were both old-fashioned. I reflected on all this. 'Decidedly, I will tell him about Roukoff,' I thought.

While I was alone with Miss Davidoff before dinner, I began my now stereotyped tale. She always said the same thing to me.

'Now tell me everything that you have been doing.'

She was always so good as to be interested. I remembered, indeed, that I had heard *her* called a gossip. She herself, however, had explained that.

'I like to have something piquant to tell my nephew when he dines at home; he works so hard and takes so little diversion—he has no vices; let us amuse him.'

'Yes, we will tell him all about your Roukoff.' She nodded brightly at me now.

Davidoff came in a few minutes before dinner was announced, his head on one side, and smiling with his mouth open as usual. He wore a very English light-coloured suit, something in tweed, and an eye-glass, which he didn't use, hanging by a broad black ribbon: this ribbon seemed to match his black hair, beginning to turn gray. Another thing people had said, I remembered now, was that he was very ugly; one couldn't, indeed, defend his features, but his face had the special beauty of extreme intelligence. His aunt was wearing an old brown silk dress; the silk was of a thin kind, that stiffly rustled, and seemed to take the character out of mine.

Davidoff mildly surveyed us. He offered us each an arm, and we went in to dinner, full of the good-humour of people who sit down to enjoy a faultless dinner at their ease. It was not till the sweets appeared that Miss Davidoff began to relate about Roukoff. What a lesson to me her account was in the art of entertaining! With my bald materials she wrought a beautiful story; the characters lived: one thought one heard them speak, and behind their voices one seemed to catch inseparable agitations and hesitations—the dark web of the facts—the background that I didn't suspect I had even indicated.

Davidoff, listening, kept his eyes fixed on mine, and beckoned the servant from time to time to bring me another glass, a fork or a plate; he wanted me to taste everything. He himself was given the most

minute portions, and ate even of those discriminatingly. He put in one or two questions about Roukoff, and seemed interested to hear that I had spoken to the Zaroubins, whom he knew personally. Finally, he said, in his deliberate way, leaning back in his chair—dinner was over:

'Miss Foster, shall I tell you my experience?'

'Oh, please!'

'It is that these cases are frauds nine times out of ten. For that reason I never give a copeck in charity. You may have heard it. Shall I tell you what I think about this Roukoff?'

'Please!'

'I think he is a humbug. I begin to remember that there was a case about him some twenty years ago. There must be a pamphlet, written by him in explanation, if I remember rightly, on my shelves. I will look for it. But, in any case, I predict that you will be undeceived and disappointed, and that this feeling will be bad for you. If you take my advice, you will do as I do, and have no more to do with such affairs. All the same, it is interesting that you and Roukoff—yes, I foresee that it will be interesting for you——'

He screwed up his eyes, his mouth, a little askew, hung open, smiling. Miss Davidoff was keenly attentive. We all rose and went into a small room, full of plants, where the little table with the box of sugar-plums was placed ready—everything was done

as if without hands at the Davidoffs'—and where tea and coffee were presently brought; but Davidoff passed through into his library, and remained there some time. His aunt meanwhile nodded gaily at me:

'I knew David would be interested. You will see, he will find out all about your Roukoff. He never forgets a word, and he never speaks of what he is not perfectly certain. I have never known him wrong. Ah, Miss Foster, allow an old woman to tell you, in her turn, that you make a mistake. You are gentle, a real womanly woman, not one of these Nihilists, yet you have an idea that you must *do* something; your heart burns over—God knows what. Why? There is no need for you to do anything; this modern idea is quite wrong. A woman *need* not be beautiful; she *ought not* to be useful: all that she requires, what *is* indispensable, is *esprit*. You have it; you need go no further: you will always, it is certain, move in the society of intelligent people. Rest, my child—rest, and take another sugar-plum. I will spread you some bread-and-butter with honey; it is delicious with coffee. We have it in Switzerland; you will like it.'

A bitter feeling rose in my heart while I munched the proffered bread-and-butter thickly spread with honey.

'How dare she tell me not to be useful! Isn't it a kind of insult to women in my person? Oughtn't

I to vehemently protest? or is it only that she is really old-fashioned? She means to be kind; she is cleverer than I; she may mean a hundred things; she certainly won't understand me.'

I said nothing to the point. Davidoff came in for his tea.

'What have you been talking about?' he asked, looking slowly from one to the other and dangling his glass.

'Miss Davidoff was saying that to please, a woman chiefly needs intelligence; that for her the most important thing is to please; that she *ought not* to be useful. Then I shall never please; but tell me at least how *you* would advise one to set about it.'

'No, no; that's all wrong,' returned Davidoff sharply; and a frown for a moment dispelled the impression of his smile. I imagined him shaking his finger at a refractory witness: 'Don't trouble your head about such things; the way to please, sensible people is to be *natural*.'

The word dropped out like a stone dropped into a well. It produced in me various feelings—delight, gratitude, I didn't know what.

'Yes, to be what we *must*, what we are,' escaped me vehemently before I knew where I was.

But I had gone too quickly; for him I had gone wrong; I immediately became conscious in his deep attentive gaze that he didn't mean that at all in its wide application; that to a freedom I saw he opposed

a firm barrier, and there was in him on that point something rigid, like the stiffness of Miss Davidoff's old chairs, with their vivid green coverings of a hue not now to be generally found; that in this passage he assisted me exquisitely, without speech, to cover my retreat—to retreat with him—only showed in perfection how far we *could* go together, and even gave me to wonder if it were not perhaps possible to acquire a taste for an attitude so admirably uncompromising. If his point of view were, after all, well chosen, might not one pause at it and there rest?

'Well,' said the old lady briskly, 'and what have you been doing, nephew, running away so rudely?'

'Pardon,' said he, 'I was looking for the pamphlet I spoke of. I can't lay my hand on it, but it is of no account; the affair was something like this: Roukoff *was* a clerk at the Senate; he was dismissed for embezzlement, if I remember rightly, and sent to Siberia. He is a clever man, and he wasn't a Bachelor of Law for nothing. He circulated a pamphlet, accusing a number of persons, and giving his version of the story. It was impudent, but amusing, so I kept it; besides, these things are useful to refer to. He explained that he was a victim of the eccentricities of a young man with whom he shared rooms; this young man had a mania for English horses, and resorted to all sorts of tricks to keep his stables filled when he was out of funds. He involved Roukoff. There was another pamphlet

in the same strain, but I forget the details. My impression is that these were simply inventions. He really embezzled. Isn't my tea cool yet?'

Russians drink their tea boiling hot. Davidoff drank it in the English style with milk.

My eyes filled with tears, partly from the little shock of a minute before; my chin trembled, I couldn't look at him; his tone more than his words aroused my generous, my idealist impulses. I wanted dreadfully at that moment that Roukoff should be a deserving person, if only—if only that I felt the blankness of disappointment as he had said, in spite of the fact that I really cared nothing at all about this Roukoff.

'But see here,' put in Miss Davidoff hastily, kindly, in much the same way that she had offered me the honey, 'admit the embezzlement, admit the shady past; haven't we all done things we regret? Are we on that account to be irretrievably ruined? All this was twenty years ago, you say! The man has not prospered on his crime, evidently; and I don't see that it's a reason for not holding out a helping hand now. Miss Foster, another cup? Don't you agree with me?'

I looked at her gratefully.

'Yes, of course; if a man is starving, his past doesn't prevent our giving him bread.'

'Davidoff has a heart like a shrivelled bean!' rang in my ears.

'Yes, I think we must help this Roukoff, in spite of your pamphlet, David,' returned the old lady, smiling, her blackbird-like eyes twinkling at him and her black curls shaking.

'Very good,' said he, putting his hands in his pockets; 'I leave Roukoff in the best hands—Amélie Adrianovna's, for instance; besides, Miss Foster has such a genius for adventures. I know very well that if she leaves Roukoff to his fate she will find someone else.'

I looked, upon this, at Davidoff with rather a strained smile. I realized that the very points he waived would always leave his position stronger. I suddenly felt that I should like him always to be on my side to defend *me*.

Davidoff, smiling pleasantly, took a book from the table, and holding it open at one place, began suddenly to talk—to talk beautifully; man's intellect as sovereign, its majesty and power, shone, played on from all the facets of his intelligence as the only good, the only reality. His deliberate words followed one after the other like notes of music perfectly played. I sat listening under a spell. I felt like a beggar-maid into whose torn robe a prince pours treasure. I opened my ears, spread my skirt to gather in every gold piece, and I didn't ask whence or why they delightfully flowed on; I gave myself up to complete enjoyment. When Davidoff, at ten o'clock, took my cloak from the peg, I said impulsively:

'I heard something horrid about you to-day. I wish I hadn't.'

'Don't tell me,' he returned quickly; 'they are always saying horrid things: and perhaps they are right, you think, since I am so hard-hearted about your Roukoff.'

I started. I had forgotten Roukoff.

'Oh no!'

'Oh yes!'—he shook his head at me—'but I look forward to what you will tell us about him when you come next time. You will tell us *everything?*'

'Everything.'

'Good,' said Davidoff.

VII

Anna Philipovna wasn't so surprised as I expected to learn that Roukoff was brother to the Governor of A—— She said he had told her so.

'Then why doesn't his brother help him? Did he tell you that?' I asked her.

'Oh, because,' Philip interrupted, 'the Governor's wife has all the money, and she made the brother promise, when he married, to cut his poor relations.'

'Why, how do *you* know?' demanded Anna Philipovna.

'I know, mother mine, because Roukoff told me, as he tells everyone; and I know also that this

precious Governor is a precious bad lot—at least, as regards the ladies. I don't know how he may be in the performance of his high duties.'

'There are these stories about everyone of position,' returned his mother with dignity; 'besides, what *has* that to do with Roukoff?' she added to me as Philip left the room. 'And I think very likely I can get at this Governor through——'

'Ah!' interrupted I in my turn, 'but wait a minute,' and I hastened to tell Anna Philipovna what Davidoff had said.

She believed it at once, and gave up the idea of approaching the Governor. She said Davidoff never spoke idly, that was his reputation. At the same time, she eagerly caught at the suggestion that a past twenty years old was immaterial to the present case; remarking that, all the same, it would be prudent not to give help in sums of money. She didn't want me to tell Philip about the embezzlement, but I insisted. Philip, however, seemed indifferent now about Roukoff. He was in low spirits and indifferent about everything.

Some weeks passed. Anna Philipovna had paid a month's rent for Roukoff in advance. Philip made a journey about Christmas time, and at the New Year we were all specially busy.

But immediately on Philip's return, his mother sent him over to the Petersburg side to see how her protégé was getting on. Our consciences smote us

after our festivities. Anna Philipovna had several pensioners who turned up at this time, and she had made no special cheer for Roukoff. Philip came back laughing; he had recovered his spirits in the country. He vowed that Roukoff was the prince of beggars, and that the best way of assisting him and one's self at the same time would be to take lessons from him in the art. He called him 'le grand maître Roukoff.'

'I asked him how he was getting on,' said Philip. '"Getting on!" this dear master replied, turning his blind eyes so indignantly on me that I nearly fell off my chair. "One lady has given me three roubles, and a bottle of milk comes every day—one miserable bottle of milk! three roubles! These are degenerate days! In former times it would have been impossible for an educated man to starve in the wealthiest city in Russia. Well, I see that we really shall starve, thanks to these charitable people. One bottle of milk and three roubles!"'

'And you find that amusing, Philip Andreitch?' said Sophie Ivanovna, in her high-pitched, lady-like voice. 'Oh, the hard-heartedness of Petersburg people! My Moscow friends would scarcely believe it. It is dis-grace-ful!'

'Scandalous!' Anna Philipovna took her up. 'So it appears that after all the *Z*aroubins have done nothing, Miss Foster. You are too credulous. When people like the *Z*aroubins tell you things,

you believe them. Amélie Adrianovna offered to go at once and tell her friends. You should have let her. Half an hour after you went away she forgot the whole affair. If she had spoken, in very shame she must have gone on. I don't want to say anything against an acquaintance of yours, but I understand this lady's type very well. She is what we call "a little great lady"—a hypochondriac into the bargain, isn't she? I, in fact, have seen her taking the waters abroad, and she exactly resembles a character in a novel by one of our great writers, who created, and at the same time immortalized, the type. "A bottle of milk! three roubles!" You see!'

I looked curiously at Anna Philipovna as she delivered herself of this, which I knew had been at the tip of her tongue some time. She had not the honour of Amélie Adrianovna's acquaintance, but she would have liked it. There was, however, some truth in her remarks. I remembered also perfectly what Amélie Adrianovna had said of *her* on one occasion. Both women were exquisitely feminine; and how they differed in every other respect! I judged it well to appear offended as I remarked stiffly that Amélie Adrianovna had excellent qualities.

Anna Philipovna felt that she had gone too far. She turned the conversation back to Petersburg stony-heartedness, and Sophie Ivanovna ably seconded her. We came to the conclusion that something *must* be done for Roukoff.

'What a horrid nuisance!' I said aloud, as I went to my room to dress.

I felt bored, irritated, and again disgusted with myself. After all, what had I done for him? Nothing. If only as a protest against Davidoff's attitude, surely I ought to.

It happened that I was going that very evening to the Zaroubins'. Amélie Adrianovna was really going into society again; she was giving large parties every fortnight. In these parties groups formed round the serious and well-known people—the eagles; the younger and more frivolous had no chance to shine, so the hostess said, and she had the idea of entertaining the 'eaglets' separately. There were not many 'eaglets' on this occasion—just enough to sit within the lamplight round a mosaic table and maintain a general conversation. There was Natasha in a vermilion silk dress, trimmed with rows of black velvet, which admirably became her blonde beauty. She, however, was discontented all the evening because she felt herself overdressed. She had believed Amélie Adrianovna's promise to be frivolous, and had expected to sing, perhaps to dance, not to sit at a table. She nodded to me gaily when I came in and made a small—a very small—grimace; but she looked quite cross as the evening passed, and still we stayed in the circle of the lamplight. Amélie Adrianovna sat on a couch against the wall, Natasha on one side and I on the other. There were some

other young ladies and several men, but Piotr Petrovitch was not there; it was the evening of a literary society to which he belonged.

Amélie Adrianovna led the conversation to serious subjects almost at once. She spoke in French of charity—of charity in St. Petersburg.

'It is impossible—quite impossible,' she told us, 'to do any lasting good in this vast city. For many years I have belonged to a small organization for charitable purposes; there are too many hindrances —the police and worldly distractions. Is it not true,' she demanded, addressing a young man of very correct, almost French, appearance, who was regarding her fixedly—'is it not true that society is beginning more and more to recognise its obligations towards—the people' (this word she uttered somewhat fearfully); 'not obligations so much in material matters, these have always been recognised more or less, but spiritual obligations—the necessity to feed and direct their souls? Is not this true?' she asked us all with enthusiasm, and, without waiting for a reply, she hurried on: 'Well, seek and ye shall find. I have found something—organization. But not here—oh no! What I have found is organization in the country.'

She paused dramatically. We all uttered various exclamations. Some of the young men looked up, others down; one or two coughed.

'Yes,' she went on still more enthusiastically,

'hear what I propose; I have planned it all out. I gather together at my country place all nice people who wish to improve the condition of the poor and miserable. I take into my house as many as I have room for; I build annexes, and, if necessary, fit up cottages. Our village becomes the headquarters of a benevolent movement. No one with a political bias will be associated; all will have for their aim simply the moral and material welfare of our poor people. Some contribute money, others practical knowledge, others spiritual energy, each according to his talent. Some will live in this colony all the year round, others as many weeks as they can afford. In time our example will be followed in other districts. The energy which is wasted year after year in town will have produced, away from worldly distraction, in a short time good fruit. Messieurs and mesdames, what do you think of my scheme?'

No one found anything to say. The silence was growing embarrassing. Lvoff bravely came to the rescue, and in a self-conscious manner, as if he were speaking in public.

'Pardon me, madam,' said he, 'if, after your beautiful enthusiasm, my observations appear a little discouraging. I do not mean them to be so; I am too thankful to be allowed to share in this noble confidence. You said that there were difficulties in the way of organization in St. Petersburg; you suggest that these will either not exist or be over-

come in the provinces. Allow me to assure you that you are optimistic; the obstacles which we find here will be repeated there. Organizations, it is a fact, do not flourish in Russia; individual effort is, however, to some extent permissible.'

Natasha smothered a slight yawn. Amélie Adrianovna became excessively nervous, afraid, one could see, of the dangerous turn the conversation might take.

'We will talk of this later, dear Monsieur Lvoff. I fear a discussion would fatigue some of these young people. What do you say, Natasha?'

Natasha brightened up; everyone began hastily talking to his neighbour. Some, I imagine, thought our hostess a dreadful bore, others wondered if she were not making some clever social move. In the midst of my own speculations, I suddenly heard my name coupled with that of Roukoff.

'Pray relate to Monsieur Lvoff, dear Miss Foster, the sad tale you were telling us of this poor man.'

Everyone looked at me. I stumbled on as well as I could. Lvoff listened politely, but chillingly, as long as the others were attentive; but finally and suddenly warmed to something like eagerness, and, looking at me over his high collar, with his head quite turned, as if he were now seeing me for the first time, asked a hundred questions. In answering these I found that the evening had passed away. No one was invited to sing or play, and the party

broke up early, Natasha offering to drive me home in her mother's carriage.

'Well, did you ever spend such a stupid evening before?' exclaimed she, as soon as we were ensconced in the roomy vehicle and rolling smoothly over the wooden pavements, lightly covered with a fresh fall of snow. 'Eaglets, indeed! why, I wasn't even asked to sing, though I told Amél' Adrian' I had brought my music.'

'Who is this Lvoff?' I inquired, merely for the sake of saying something.

'He! oh, he is more stupid than the others; it was his first visit. Don't you hate a man who is scented all over?—so effeminate; and stephanotis is my pet aversion!'

'He seemed most exquisitely got up.'

'Yes, horrid; not at all the sort one would expect to find at Amél' Adrian's, but it appears he is *serious*. Did you ever hear anything so ridiculous as Amél' Adrian's plan? Of course nothing will come of it.'

I couldn't see Natasha's face in the dark; her tone expressed the deepest disgust.

'I heard one cheering bit of news, though,' she went on after a pause, cuddling up in her white *bashlik*—'this concert Amél' Adrian' is going to give at her house, and she has asked me to sing as much as I like.'

'A concert!'

I was really surprised.

'Yes, don't you know? Why, it's for that stupid man you were telling me of. What's his name?—it begins with an R.'

'Roukoff?'

'Something like that. The concert is to be quite a large affair—to get as much money as possible. After all, these wretches are of some use in the world.'

'Well!'

I was as if stupefied.

'Amél' Adrian' *is* a wool-gatherer, I have always said. Fancy not telling you! She wants us all to set to work and design invitation cards in the Gothic style; it is to be a Gothic concert, whatever that may be—something original, I suppose. Do you draw?'

'A little.'

'Well, then, you will get a letter about it to-morrow; but if I were you I shouldn't waste my time over that nonsense. Why not have one card designed, and print the others from it? Amél' Adrian' is *so* unpractical.'

'And all this is for Roukoff?'

'Why, yes; it seems he's the hero of the hour. Amél' Adrian' has not been idle. Didn't you hear her asking Prince S. to get the man's children places on the new Siberian Railway?'

'I didn't.'

'Oh, well, it was before you came, then. I con-

gratulate you on having discovered the hero; he's going to take, evidently. You don't look pleased; you're queer girls, you English. Didn't you see that Amél' Adrian' wanted you to drag Lvoff in? He's a relation of Prince S.'s. She thinks that the S.'s will help her with her colony; but they won't.'

'I'm very stupid, certainly.'

'You're a darling! Well, I'm going to practise like fury. I know what I'm going to sing, and if you could find out what a Gothic dress is, I'll get one. Your Roukoff is simply a godsend!'

'Natasha——' I was beginning solemnly; but at that moment the carriage came to a stop, the horses plunging.

I had just time to embrace her and get on to the pavement, when they set off again at a gallop. I thought I saw something white flutter at the window for a moment.

I stood a good while in the cold in the street, waiting to be let in, but I scarcely heeded that. I was excited; my thoughts would not leave me for a long time, tired as I was. The incidents of the evening surged up again and again in my brain, and, as I fell asleep, I thought that I was at the Gothic concert, and that Roukoff was directing it.

VIII

At luncheon next day I told Anna Philipovna of the new turn in the affairs of her protégé. She was overjoyed, and begged me to find out immediately whether the concert was to be private or semi-public, and if the latter, what would be the price of tickets? She made the *amende honorable* as regarded Amélie Adrianovna, and acknowledged that the Zaroubins were excellent people. Sophie Ivanovna began to give me Piotr Petrovitch's pedigree, but I didn't pretend to listen; there was something else on my mind.

'I must see Roukoff,' I said abruptly. 'It occurred to me last night that I have never even set eyes on him. Couldn't I go to-day?'

'Certainly. You could go—with Philip.'

'Philip!' screamed out Anna Philipovna. 'We want you.'

Her son, who had had a late breakfast in his own room, appeared, terribly untidy, with bits of fluff on his coat and with reddened eyelids: he had been working all night. He walked round the table and shook hands with us.

'Miss Foster wants to see Roukoff. When do you want to go?' she added, turning to me.

'The sooner the better; I have a lesson over there at three o'clock.'

'You must take her, Philip. You had better get ready at once; you haven't too much time. And you must drive; I couldn't let you go any other way. It's not a nice day for a drive, unfortunately.'

'Why all this hurry to see the dear soul?' queried he, rubbing his inflamed eyes, and staring at us.

'Well, you can hear that as you go along. Now, get ready at once, and take a cab from the door. Do you understand? From the door.'

'Very well,' said Philip.

I also hurried away; I was agreeably excited. 'I'm going to see Roukoff! I'm going to see Roukoff!' I hummed to myself, bustling about in my room; and in order to look quite English for some reason, I put on my jacket. But, seated in the sledge, Philip and I were silent. The weather, as Anna Philipovna had said, was most disagreeable. A cold, sleety wind blew hard in our faces. He pulled down his cap over his nose, and I turned up my collar; we pushed our hands down between our knees under the fur rug and rounded our shoulders. The horse set off at a good pace, as if anxious to get to his destination. On the river it was much worse; we came in for a perfect gale. The sleet stung like a whip, and drifted into the folds of our clothes, and down our necks, and into our eyes and mouths most unpleasantly. It was impossible to see anything—a regular blizzard.

'Hold your head well down,' called out Philip, 'and grip with your feet.'

The sledge rocked and bumped and tossed us about, but we stuck to it the harder, and it brought us up safely into the streets again. We were dripping when it pulled up, and we got down before a low wooden coffee-coloured house, with overhanging carved eaves, in a side-street not far from the river. We shook ourselves like dogs, and Philip gave me several hard smacks which dislodged small snowdrifts about my dress. We wrung our sleeves, or caps, and even our hair, in the tiny hall, where we left our galoshes, and then we followed a rather pretty young woman up some creaking wooden stairs painted brown. She didn't even ask what we had come for.

'How is *he?*' Philip grinned. 'This English lady wants to see him.'

The young woman tossed her head at the question, but smiled. She looked at me stealthily. She was the newly-married wife of Lebedeff, a former student and comrade of Philip, whom, it was easy to guess, she knew pretty well.

'You can see for yourself,' she returned over her shoulder, flinging open a door. 'Some visitors!' she called out, and went away.

Philip, advancing with an air of solicitude, put a tin of cocoa down on a table, went up to someone sitting in a chair, and said in his ear in Russian:

'I am Philip Andreitch. I have come to see how you are. I have brought an English lady.'

'Very good of you. Ask the lady to sit down.'

Roukoff got up, and seemed to be groping about for a chair. Philip forestalled him, and motioned me to the seat. I took possession of it as if it were an island in a flood. The other two sat down facing one another. I gazed with great interest at Roukoff, who at first sight impressed me favourably. He must have been a very handsome man. He might now have been any age between fifty and seventy. His thin brown hair was quite gray; he was above the average height, and emaciated; blue veins streaked his wrists and temples. He had a splendid, a noble forehead, delicately-modelled features, and a long, straight nose. He was frightfully pale. His eyes—blue, and wide open—were covered with film; but his mouth, which I noticed last of all, was absolutely hideous. In looking at it, there came to my mind a young man I had known when a child, and whom I certainly hadn't thought of for ten years. He had impressed my youthful imagination because the elders used to speak of him in hushed tones, shaking their heads, and saying that he had 'gone to the bad,' an expression of which they could give no clear account. Roukoff had just the same ugly, shapeless mouth that I remembered in that young man; the lips were bluish, and sometimes turned white. Roukoff certainly looked hard up; he had on a frightfully dirty gray flannel shirt, and shabby pepper-and-salt cloth coat and trousers with most of

the buttons off, filthy white socks, and shoes down at heel. I had plenty of time to take all this in, and also to look about me, for I wasn't given a chance to join in the conversation. Roukoff had turned to me almost at once, and asked my permission to speak in German; he said the people of the house listened at the doors.

'Of course, of course,' Philip answered him.

Philip spoke German, but I didn't. 'I'll tell you what he says, afterwards,' he added in English to me. But I was disappointed, it wasn't at all the same thing.

'Come here and speak to the lady,' Roukoff called out.

A diminutive creature standing at the window glowered at us, but didn't move. He had snatched the tin of cocoa from the table and had it in his hands.

'Oh, never mind,' Philip sang out in an exaggerated cheery tone.

So, having nothing else to do, I looked about me. We were in a slip of a room, probably partitioned off from a larger one. It was clean, with a painted floor. A bed against the wall was carelessly made up with a rug. In addition to the scanty and worn furniture usual in such hired rooms I noticed a brand new chest of drawers stuck against the partition wall, a large dress basket, padlocked, and a heap of small baskets of various shapes piled up in a corner. There

was a collection of wine, medicine, and other bottles near the stove. The snow upon the opposite houses and in the street reflected in through the window made all these objects dazzlingly bright. But gradually my attention from these was drawn to Roukoff's son, who continued to stand in the window, restlessly peeling the paper off the cocoa tin. He looked frightfully ill, or rather as if he had never been well. At first he seemed to me deformed, and then as if ravaged by some horrible disease. I wanted to talk to him, but I didn't know how to do so in his father's presence, which seemed to have the effect of making me unnatural even to myself. At last the boy, attracted by my stare and my desire, began to stare back at me, and suddenly in this silent stare something took place between us—something seemed to stretch out across the room from me to him and from him to me. We looked steadily and intelligently at one another.

He was half dead already; there was nothing strange in perceiving that I was in the presence of a tragedy; what violently shook me was the perception that the victim understood it too. His sullen, bony face, without eyebrows or eyelashes, his wasted, shrinking figure were repulsive; but sullenness and fear spell tyranny. What chance could he have had under the blight of Roukoff?

We were asking one another this question, and the intensity of life, of pity, that surged up in me during

these long minutes, giving me the sensation of having a sixth sense, and the tension of this silent exchange between us two, became more than I could bear.

Roukoff and Philip were having an animated conversation; it seemed interminable. I caught the words Charcot, Nice, Paris, Zaroubin; it sounded interesting, but I was forced to interrupt it: I felt that I could stay no longer in the room. I touched Philip on the sleeve.

'I shall be late—I must go,' I said, in a voice which I couldn't raise.

Philip rose.

'This lady has an engagement elsewhere,' he said. 'She has been trying to get a place in a school for your son. Since, however, it appears from these papers'—he touched some in a shallow drawer—'that he is *sixteen*, we had better leave all that alone.'

Roukoff smiled maliciously, but instantly turning his face towards me with a servile expression, he came after me as I went towards the door.

'Many, many thanks for all you have done for me, dear young lady,' he said; 'I am very grateful,' and he groped after my hand, seized it, and pressed it.

I withdrew it quickly, and making an inarticulate noise, got out of the room. I heard Philip say a few words, then he came out too, grasped my arm tightly, and hurried me down the stairs. He looked very solemn.

'You—gave—him—your—hand!'

'I didn't—he took it.'

'Philip Andreitch, I wish to speak to you for a moment,' said young Madam Lebedeff, coming out into the hall.

'Oh, I can't wait,' said I in English; 'but just tell me my way to the Quay. I shall be all right, and you stay and speak to her.'

'No, no.' He raised his voice. 'I am going a short distance with mademoiselle.' Philip opened the hall-door. 'I shall be back again soon.'

'Mind you are; there is something important I have to say,' called out the young woman.

We hurried down the street. Snow was freshly heaped up along one side; the gale had passed, and the sun was shining; there were light fleecy clouds high in the sky; it was a fine afternoon. I breathed more freely.

'Well, what do you think of *le grand maître* now you've seen him?' Philip asked, looking into my face.

'I don't know. I don't like him. I'm sorry for the boy. Sixteen! He looks ten.'

'When the father shook hands with you I nearly kicked the scoundrel, that's what *I* think of him. But it was smart of him, wasn't it? I hope you noticed how I played up to him all through. He thinks he takes me in, but he never did.'

'You forget that I didn't understand what you were saying.'

'Ah! you see—I must explain that. He says the Lebedeffs listen to every word. According to him, they were behind the door then. He says the most awful things about them, by the way. Then he talked about his blindness; he thinks of going to Paris next, because Charcot took an interest in him once. He says he ought to be treated. It was rich the way he talked. He was boasting half the time how the grand ladies at Nice used to run after him, and the large sums of money they gave him.'

'He must be mad!'

'It is a kind of madness,' said Philip dryly. 'Mademoiselle, if I tell you one observation I made, will you let it be entirely between us two?'

'Certainly.'

'Then, perhaps you noticed how he flushed up once?'

'Yes, I did. I was wondering.'

'It was when I winked and asked him if he had been sent to Siberia for political reasons. He replied, "No, not exactly." Only fancy the cheek of that! Not exactly, indeed. He went as a common convict, that's how he went. Now mark, mademoiselle, *immediately* afterwards he tried to draw me out—oh, so cleverly, the old serpent!—but there isn't anything to get out of me, is there? How I should like to kick *ce cher maître!* Do you understand me?'

We had come out on the Quay, almost opposite the large white house where my pupil lived. As I looked

up at it it seemed to be swaying in the pure atmosphere. I made no reply to Philip. He turned away.

'I'm in for a wigging from little Lebedeva, I know,' he said, making a face as he went off.

IX

Philip reached home first, and when I came in to dinner everyone present, without even a greeting, threw at me:

'Imagine! Roukoff is a fraud, a blackmailer!'

'I wish we'd never had anything to do with him,' groaned Anna Philipovna.

'Why? how? what?'

'I'm too indignant to speak. Tell what happened,' she commanded her son.

She was very hungry, and there was a specially good beetroot soup with sausages floating about in it. The cabbage pies were works of art.

'Ah, mademoiselle, you went away too soon; if you had stayed, and had seen what I saw——' Philip's subdued grin expressed the refinement of pleasure. 'The Lebedeffs can't stand *le grand maître* any longer. If I hadn't gone to-day, they would have been here. They have suspected something wrong for some weeks. Money is rolling in; he sends off orders for large amounts to his wife at

Tomsk. They know through an old woman who does errands for him. Carriages roll up to the house all day, and the neighbours begin to complain. That's why the Lebedeffs listen at his door; they overhear his conversations with the boy, whom, by the way, he tyrannizes over dreadfully; he uses him as a sort of secretary. He dictates threatening letters to him; once they heard the boy read aloud a letter from the mother at Tomsk: "With the money you sent I have bought three cows"—that is, when you read it aloud. "Obliged to sell our last cow," put in Roukoff, and so on. And that boy is really in an awful state; he eats nothing. The Lebedeffs think he will die soon. And such things there are to eat! The grand ladies bring baskets of caviare, rabchick, cream, bottles of wine, and Roukoff complains, "Why all this food? I am tired of it. Now, if they brought me money'; and he throws the food away, and sends out to buy a herring. While Lebedeva was telling me all this, and imploring me to get rid of him, some of these grand ladies were actually with Roukoff—Princess Sherematieff and her daughter. They were talking French; a murmur reached us through the partition. Roukoff seemed to be holding forth. "You don't believe me, I know," said Lebedeva; "but just stand at the door, and see how they'll treat me when they come out. They were sweet enough when they went in: that's how it always is now." Of course

I did believe her; I felt very sorry for her in her false position. She isn't a bad little woman; but I just wanted to see the whole show, so as soon as the chairs moved I went with her on to the landing. But directly I saw these ladies come out of that scoundrel's room, as out of a holy place, letting down their veils over their softened features, I fairly boiled over, planted myself in front of them, and said:

'"Ladies, you ought to know the truth: that man in there is simply an abandoned wretch; he has plenty of money; he is deceiving you."

'"And pray who may you be?" the mamma asked, rather frightened, catching hold of her daughter's hand.

'"I am a student, as you see; my name is —— I am going to expose this man."

'"Indeed! There are others, perhaps, whom it would be better to expose." The Princess threw that of course at poor Lebedeva, who was trembling at my audacity. She moved on past me. "We shall make inquiries, you may be sure."

'You should have seen the way she looked me up and down! Oh, it was grand! She held her poor daughter quite tightly, and hurried her off into the carriage. Little Lebedeva, of course, turned on me; she said I had made everything ten times worse. But you know it all happened in a moment, and when I came to think of it, it seemed so funny I burst out laughing. She nearly flew at me then.

What a fuss to make over that scoundrel, wasn't it? I shook my fist at his door, and nearly began to dance.'

'You *are* mad, Philip,' said his mother, who had just swallowed her last mouthful of soup and pie. Have you rung the bell? Why doesn't Axsenia come?'

The bell was rung again; Axsenia appeared and handed me a visiting-card.

'A boy in livery brought it, and he's waiting for an answer; the little imp pretended he couldn't find the front entrance, so he came through the great gates and across the courtyard. I'd a good mind to make him go round to the front,' said Axsenia.

On the card (Amélie Adrianovna's) was written in English:

'DEAR MISS FOSTER,

'If you please, come to-day evening to us and explain about this dreadful man.

'Yours,

'A. A. L.'

'Say I'll come at once,' I cried, tossing it on the table; and the blood rushed to my head. I stared at Philip. 'You *have* made a mess!' and I saw how I must be looking, in his face.

Anna Philipovna pounced on the card and instantly turned on him, too.

'Yes; why did you interfere? When you ought

to hold your tongue, you speak; and when you should be discreet, you blab everything out. Miss Foster is quite right: there *is* a mess, and it's your doing. Amélie Adrianovna is in a fix, one can see. Of course those ladies drove straight to her: you frightened them. They gave her a bad quarter of an hour.'

Anna Philipovna's lip curled, as much as to say she knew what bad quarters of an hour ladies *could* give one another.

'But I never thought——'

'Of course you never thought—do you ever think of anyone else? Don't you understand? They all know one another. It's their set.'

'Well, it's done now,' I wanly smiled: 'she'll have to pitch into me.'

I didn't particularly enjoy the prospect: I really was annoyed; but as the bewilderment of these charitable ladies, and the feelings of Amélie Adrianovna at this moment burst on me, I saw some humour in the thing, and I began to laugh. The others joined in awkwardly, surprised and relieved. But I reflected also, and my reflections were painful. I thought of Davidoff, smiling, his mouth open, dangling his glass while he slowly said, 'These cases are frauds nine times out of ten; you will be disappointed. I never give a copeck'; and meanwhile Anna Philipovna was consoling me with:

'I know Amélie Adrianovna; I know the type—the concert, the places on the Siberian railway, all those charitable ladies. God knows whom or what she has set in motion by this time—where it may all stop, and what it may lead to.'

'God knows!' I groaned.

As soon as dinner was over, I prepared to rush off to the Zaroubins. I was already descending the stairs when Philip came out of the hall-door after me, and leaning over the balustrade, in the greenish glare of the incandescent gas above his head, said:

'I'm awfully sorry. I see that I made a fool of myself; it ought to have come from you, but I couldn't help it. When I saw those ladies coming from that madman's room, I lost my head; my soul boiled over; I had to speak.'

'Never mind. I lost my head, too, when it struck me just now that *I* had put that dangerous man into communication with all sorts of people.'

'Oh, they're all right,' he responded, turning his head to listen if we were being overheard.

'I shall be back in an hour,' I called out, going downstairs.

'What's an hour's unpleasantness to *you?*' I heard him mutter. The door clicked to.

'But why on earth couldn't I mind my own business!' I groaned as I went down. 'I had only to do that. But it all seemed so simple; and yet if I'd been true to my first instinct, I shouldn't have

been caught by a Roukoff. Is Davidoff really right?' I had a fevered walk considering the point.

The lights were turned low in Amélie Adrianovna's room; she was alone, reading Amiel's Journal—a good omen! I rushed up to her couch, sat down beside her, and exclaimed:

'Oh, I'm so very sorry; what *must* you think?'

'My husband advised me to ask you to come, Miss Foster,' said she severely; 'I was completely upset. Imagine these ladies! they were indignant—alarmed; they asked a thousand questions. My poor head ached so; what could I say but that I had it all from you?'

'Oh, I know, I know; all the same, it's quite simple; I will tell you everything.'

'Yes, you really must. I told them that you would explain everything,' said Amélie Adrianovna.

'After all, it might have been worse,' she sighed. 'I think I told you that I was getting up a concert, and I should have sent out the invitations, but that my husband desired to make further inquiries. Though he is so busy, he went to see this man himself; he would not let me go for fear of infection, but he took with him Professor Briansky, the great diagnost, that we might know exactly what is the matter with that poor child, and also to see if anything could be done for the father's blindness.'

'How good of Piotr Petrovitch!'

'My husband is an angel. I thank God night and morning,' said his wife. 'Alas! this man Roukoff is as wicked as my husband is good. Do you know, I do not understand these things'—she sank her voice—'but my husband says that Roukoff's blindness comes from a disease of the spine, and is the result of the dissipated life he has led. Professor Briansky says it is an interesting case, but nothing can be done, and eventually the disease will attack the brain, if indeed it hasn't already done so, and Roukoff will die mad. The poor boy is diseased too, and would never grow up; he is in a rapid consumption. I think, dear Miss Foster, that all we do should be done for this poor victim. I am going to write to-morrow to the sanatorium at Chalillo to see if they will take him in there, but of course the father won't let him go.'

'It is very good of you.'

'We were so much interested. You met little Lvoff here the other evening. Well, do you know that after you spoke to him about Roukoff he could not rest? When he left the house he drove straight to him. He had never thought about such things before, and he was so touched and impressed that, late though it was, he drove back here and insisted on coming in. My husband had returned; I put on my dressing-gown, and we sat up to hear all about it. Lvoff had tears in his eyes; he said that something must be done. He made such an impression

that my husband took Professor Briansky this morning——'

'This morning!'

'Yes; and this morning Lvoff was there again with all sorts of linen, even pocket-handkerchiefs. He said that Roukoff had nothing to put on but dirty rags.'

'Oh! oh!'

'You see what a bad man it is. But do you not like little Lvoff? He has a good heart; he *looks* worldly only because he has been brought up in such a way. This Roukoff affair may be very important for him; his enthusiasm must not be chilled just at the beginning when his heart is touched. It is particularly unfortunate, for this reason, that Roukoff should be such a bad man. And those kind ladies. One gave him a new chest of drawers because he had nowhere to put anything; another gave him a good rug because he had no bed covering. He has received many, many things and much money by this time. Professor Briansky gave to him, my husband gave to him, Lvoff gave to him; I could reckon up quite a large sum. We are going to make inquiries in Tomsk, and find out what his life is there. If he is really poor, we shall not regret so much what we have done, but we suspect that he may have means. He talks about a house that is mortgaged there; he wants to obtain—— But, indeed, his conversation is so wild that my husband

thinks his brain may really be affected. Lvoff gave him a flask of his own cognac, and Roukoff, after tasting it, said: "It is good, but I have better myself." This boasting is not at all the language of a professional beggar in his right mind.'

As Amélie Adrianovna talked on in this strain her stiffness entirely disappeared. We became quite excited at last over the perception that if we had not got hold of a deserving case, at least we had been got hold of by a remarkable rascal.

Natasha was practising for the Gothic concert when I next saw her after this exposure of the hero. She had chosen the most appropriate songs, and was in despair when I broke the disappointing news to her.

'What! no concert! Darling Miss Foster, it is impossible that such a wretched man should spoil our pleasure. I have been working quite hard over these.' She rapidly turned over her music, and tossed at me some sheets headed 'An Angel's Tear' and 'Oh, Divine Love!' 'Look!' she cried tragically, 'could anything have been better? I pictured to myself the whole audience melted into tears, and Amél' Adrian' from modesty being obliged to run from the room; and then, how she would come up and embrace me afterwards! And now there will be no concert, you say? Oh, but that's odious!' She reflected a minute. 'I suppose it would be something like mockery to sing these songs at Amél' Adrian's now?'

'I don't advise you to sing them.'

'No, I see it wouldn't do,' she sighed. 'I wouldn't offend Amél' Adrian' for anything, and I suppose she won't be able to look at a beggar for a month at least now.'

'Oh, really, Natasha, take some other songs and go and cheer her up.'

'Yes; but then, I've learned *these*,' she pouted, 'and they won't do for any of my other friends; they would say I wanted to send them to sleep.'

'That's a pity!' I remarked sympathetically.

'Ah, you *are* a nice girl; you understand; I can talk to you. By the way, that little Lvoff: did he really weep about this Roukoff, and all that?'

'So Amél' Adrian' said.'

'That's delightful! However, it won't do. Being serious doesn't really suit him a bit. If they knew, his own set would tease him to death. I see it pleases you. But, in my opinion, it spoils the young man, who is simply as God made him. Now *I*,' added Natasha, with the funniest little air imaginable, 'really do get on with Amél' Adrian'. La—da—da—da!'

She wheeled round on the piano-stool, and began to sing in her pure, young, and sweet voice, 'Oh, Divine Love!' She sang it through to the very end, tenderly, beautifully. A lump came in my throat. I sat gazing at her, almost worshipping her.

'There now,' cried she when she had finished, jumping up with a slightly heightened colour, and still trembling from the effort, 'don't you *see* them all dissolved in tears? And you, I declare! I am honoured. Well, that's the triumph your horrid Roukoff deprives me of. Never mind, there will be another concert for another Roukoff; and I will keep it till then.'

'There may be another concert,' I gloomily said. 'I hope there won't be another Roukoff,' I thought to myself.

I was getting dreadfully tired of him. Anna Philipovna and Sophie Ivanovna had him on the brain; he was the peg on which they now hung all their discourses upon the corruption of St. Petersburg. That he seemed to be equally at home in all the capitals of Europe made no difference. It was in vain that I demurred to living, as it were, in the perpetual society of such a scoundrel. His reputation as *le grand maître* was established, and merely increased by each fresh revelation of his enormities. For, meanwhile, more and more people were being drawn into the affair. Even the Governor of Tomsk, the chief priest, and the chief banker, had by this time heard of Roukoff.

Suddenly, at the time the great thaw set in, weariness mercifully seemed to overtake everyone. His name ceased to be mentioned; he had tired us out. It was as if he had never been. Not for anything

would I have revived it. I had seen the Davidoffs again. Davidoff, in his most deliberate tones, had demonstrated that I had been very foolish. I agreed with him. I hardened my heart.

It struck me as singular afterwards, I may remark here, that about this time the portraits and busts of Philip's father left off looking at me sadly and reproachfully, I fancied; they seemed to have no expression at all, to be mere blanks, so much bronze and painted canvas, so much furniture. And Anna Philipovna never mentioned her husband now; much less did she appeal to me to 'guide' her; he seemed to have dropped out of the atmosphere of the house as completely as Roukoff had done. Philip only, when his mother was about to do something specially ill-considered, would look slyly across the table at me, and from his lips would come the syllable 'Rou——.' He mercifully abstained from more.

X

A telegram from Roukoff! The fluttering sheet broke the charm of our indifference. We were positively eager to know what he could have to say. In forty-two words he informed Anna Philipovna that his son had died that afternoon, described his grief, and invited her to pay the burial expenses.

'I shall go there to-morrow,' said Anna Philipovna, when she had spelt this out with the aid of her tortoiseshell nippers. 'Though I thank God the boy is dead, I should not like him to be buried as a pauper, just carted away. I think the least I can do, after being the means of entangling so many people, is to take *this* burden entirely on my shoulders.'

No one had anything against it, especially as a minute after a note was put into my hand from Amélie Adrianovna, enclosing a duplicate telegram, and begging us to immediately do what was necessary, as her back ached dreadfully.

'He has sent telegrams to everyone,' declared Anna Philipovna; 'if we don't look out he'll reap a fine harvest over this funeral.'

Accordingly she and Philip started off the first thing next morning. They returned at mid-day.

'Why didn't you tell me about that little Lvoff?' she demanded enthusiastically, untying her bonnet-strings. 'He is simply a pearl. He was coming away when we got to the house. He had already arranged the whole affair, and I had quite a difficulty in persuading him to let me bear half the trifling expense. Fancy, Roukoff sent off sixty telegrams! Lvoff doesn't want the Zaroubins to be troubled. It seems that Roukoff was actually at their house an hour before the boy died. He made a scene there, and had to be carried out. What a frightful man! He pretended that he wanted Piotr Petrovitch to

intercede for him with his relations. Lvoff says that with such a man one never knows what may happen, so he has gone off to tell the whole story to the Chief of Police. We are to meet him again this evening at Roukoff's for the first part of the funeral service.'

Anna Philipovna and Philip were late in returning from this; I didn't see them, but I found a note under my door when I awoke begging me to get up and come to the funeral.

It was a glorious morning, fresh and balmy, the first day of spring—of that Petersburg spring which stays for such a short time and melts into summer even as one prepares to delight in it. At seven o'clock the sun was pouring a dazzling flood of brightness into my room under the blind and drawn curtains. My heart seemed to expand with the joy of being alive. A whiff from Axsenia's delicious coffee, which she was carrying past my door, warned me that there was no time to lose. Without troubling to fully dress, I put on a wrapper and went into the dining-room.

Anna Philipovna seemed also very joyous; she smiled approvingly.

'The religious ceremony is at the house at nine; the burial service is at eleven. What are you going to wear?'

'Oh, black, I suppose.'

'Well, yes,' nodded she, inhaling the freshly-made coffee with pleasure; 'but I don't approve of mourn-

ing, do you? And in such a case, what a mockery! Take plenty of coffee, and do eat something; Orthodox funerals are very tedious: you will want it. Where's Philip? Asleep, of course. Philip! Get up at once —the funeral!' she screamed, knocking vigorously on his door. I ordered an *isvostchik* to be here at nine, last night,' she added, coming back; 'Monsieur Lvoff begged me to be punctual. I have taken a great fancy to Monsieur Lvoff.'

I myself was in excellent spirits. I had a black beaver hat with black feathers and tiny orange bows. I debated whether I should take the latter out or cover them up. 'What *does* it matter, really?' I thought as I tucked them under, and I recalled the reply of the old *dame de compagnie* to her patroness when she remonstrated with her for only covering the front of her green bonnet with crape during mourning for the Imperial Family. 'It's half-mourning,' the old lady had said. I laughed out loud at the recollection. Philip, on the contrary, was decidedly out of humour.

'Why are *you* going?' he asked me crossly as we paced up and down on the pavement in the sunshine waiting for the cab. 'You'd much better leave it alone. You're not wanted.'

'Oh, but I'm interested. I've never been at a Russian funeral.'

'Oh, that's it! You are interested in Monsieur Lvoff, too, I suppose!'

'For shame, Philip!' exclaimed his mother.

'I am,' returned I calmly. 'I think he's behaving most generously. I feel, to a certain extent, responsible, and I want—by my presence, at least—to show that I feel so, not to leave it all on his shoulders.'

'Well, I from the first disclaimed responsibility, and I protest against being made to assume the appearance of an interest and a benevolence I never experienced. Why should I attend this beast's brat's funeral?' said he excitedly. 'I thought you, at least, had burnt your fingers enough; but no, women are all alike. For a bit of sentimentalism——'

'But Philip——' I was beginning.

'Don't answer him; he isn't worth it,' Anna Philipovna interrupted. 'You would wish us to go alone, and hang at every moment on Monsieur Lvoff, then?' she sharply inquired of her son.

Philip replied:

'I shall be there as soon as you. Here's the cab.'

He walked rapidly away as it drove up and stopped with a jerk.

'He's annoyed,' explained his mother, settling her skirts complacently when we were seated, 'because he compares unfavourably with this little Lvoff;' and she continued to sing Lvoff's praises till we reached the little brown house.

The moment we crossed the threshold the downcast eyes and subdued expressions of the Lebedeffs, and the general atmosphere of tension, reminded us of

what we had come for—reminded us of the presence of death. The Russian lower middle classes make quite as much of funerals as the English; and one could see that for the time being, as chief mourner, Roukoff had regained his prestige. The very air, perhaps from the incense burned over-night, was oppressive, and I soon had that peculiar sensation one sometimes experiences while awake—of moving in a dream. My limbs became heavy, and my head became light; everything seemed strangely unreal and yet vivid, and the strain of keeping my attention fixed contracted my forehead precisely as if I had a painful headache, or was straining my eyes through glasses too strong for my sight, and I suddenly felt strange somehow—isolated. 'After all, what am I doing among all these people?' I murmured.

We found Lvoff with bent head pacing up and down the neat little drawing-room, with its rickety furniture and gimcracks. He came forward to greet Anna Philipovna, and bowed slightly to me.

'I expect the priest every moment,' said he, in an agitated low voice, consulting his watch. 'I am in a fever until this performance is safely over. I expect trouble. Roukoff bears the very worst character. The Chief of Police gave me a most attentive audience yesterday; at parting he pressed my hand and said: "You have all my sympathy. I shall keep an eye on the affair." And this morning the police doctor has been, and an inspector has just put in my hands

twenty roubles, "with the Prefect of Police's compliments to Monsieur Lvoff," towards expenses. That's all well enough, but I wish this was over.'

He wiped the perspiration from his white, tense face and resumed his walk. We sank into chairs, and were presently joined by Philip; he tried to talk gaily, standing before me, but I was vexed, and replied in monosyllables. At last the priest came, a dignified, pleasant-looking, middle-aged man. Lvoff shook hands with him cordially.

'Then we may begin?' he asked, looking round.

'I am ready,' replied the priest; and in the passage we could see his deacon, with an armful of tapers, holding the censer.

'I will tell Roukoff,' Lvoff said nervously, mechanically taking out his watch, and he went out.

Immediately afterwards from the next room—the slip of a room partitioned off, where the corpse lay—proceeded a babble of voices in altercation; above them all the loud and angry tones of Roukoff himself.

'You want to get me out of the house to rob me. I won't leave this room till the doors are nailed up. You —— —— thieves! I don't want your —— service,' etc.

Against the torrent of abuse that followed we heard the mild and diplomatic accents of Lvoff struggling in vain. We all looked on the ground in confusion. The priest raised his hands in horror,

and made the sign of the cross. Lvoff came to us again, paler still.

'I have given in to save a greater scandal. I have sent for the *dvorniks*, and ordered them to nail up the doors. The people of the house are behaving very well; they place themselves at my disposal. But what can I say to *you* in extenuation, Father Gavril?'

'I understand,' the good man said gravely. 'It is a madman in there. I am more occupied to-day than I can say; but I shall wait all the morning if necessary.'

He seated himself, spreading out his purple cassock, and folded his hands on his knees. His long hair and long beard flowed majestically down. We felt a little reassured.

Folding-doors divided the room in which we sat from the apartment of Roukoff. These were the doors which the *dvorniks* sent for by Lvoff now began to nail up. The hammering was tremendous, and shook the whole house. It went on for half an hour, mingled with the oaths and cries of the wretched man. More than once he called on the *dvorniks* to stop, and we heard his hands groping over the doors to discover if they were really being made fast. Most of what he said and what the men said was unintelligible to me; but my companions shuddered, and from time to time Lvoff would start from his seat, and then, as if restraining himself by a great

effort, sit down again. Anna Philipovna was crimson in the face, and murmured 'Scandal! scandal!' Philip, I was aware, was leaning against the wall, with his hands in his pockets, and smiling with his most cynical expression. I didn't venture to look at him, but sat on thorns, squeezing my fingers together till my black gloves cracked.

At length the work was completed. Roukoff threw his whole weight again and again against the doors, but they remained firm.

'I am satisfied,' he called out; 'the service may begin.'

We needed no further word, and filed out into the passage, where we found crowded together the Lebedeffs, the *dvorniks*, and the deacon. This latter, making way for his superior, marshalled us in a double line, and gave us each a lighted taper.

'You mustn't go into that room—infection, you know,' Lvoff whispered to Anna Philipovna and me; 'stand here—so.'

There would not, indeed, have been room in the tiny apartment for so many people; and even where we stood in the passage a slight odour of decomposition reached us, soon lost in the thick, sweet smell of the incense as, to his monotonous, droning chant, the deacon swung his censer.

I stood behind Lvoff and looked over his shoulder. The body of Roukoff's son lay in its slight wooden coffin across two chairs. Such a frail, waxen thing

it seemed, lying there smothered in cheap lace and brocade. The head, raised on a pillow, was, however, beautiful—noble; it was extraordinary to see on a face the miniature of Roukoff's an expression so calm, so unearthly. As the chant rose and fell a similar calm flowed into my soul. The coffin seemed to stand in the midst of a deserted space, and I alone with it. The priest, these people, Roukoff standing there almost touching it—there, where his power ceased—were blotted out.

At the close of the service even he, however, seemed momentarily impressed. He kissed the cross held out to him; he kissed the motionless temples, yellowed like old ivory, of the aged, aged face of his boy, and I suspect we all had then a moment's softening towards him. But, that done, he turned sharply round, and even before the priest had left the room he shouted out that it should be cleared, and that the coffin should remain below in the street till he had seen to the nailing up of the other door. The priest was saying to Lvoff in the drawing-room:

'I can't take a fee for this, the Church would be stained by accepting the money; but you can give something to my deacon if you like.'

'Will your honour be pleased to hand it to me through the window?' then begged the latter. 'I wouldn't touch it else.'

'Certainly, certainly,' hurriedly assented poor Lvoff; 'whatever you wish.' He squeezed the

priest's hand. 'We are enormously indebted to you,' he said, blushing; probably he had never felt obliged to a priest before.

We all now, except the *dvorniks* and the Lebedeffs, delighted that the religious part of our ordeal was over, went into the street, where we found a row of cabs drawn up to the curb, and a crowd of wretched-looking people kept at a distance by two gendarmes. As the knocking upstairs continued, the passers-by, who were obliged to cross to the other side of the street, inquired with curiosity what was going on, and joined themselves to the crowd to see the fun, freely exchanging remarks about us.

At last, when our patience was ebbing fast, the coffin was brought out and placed in the hearse. Roukoff followed, in rags, and supported by a red-faced, coarse-looking woman on one side, and by a *dvornik* on the other. Behind them came the Lebedeffs. On the pavement Roukoff attempted to fall down; the woman let go his arm, but the second *dvornik* came forward, a gendarme briskly stepped up, and he was hoisted into a closed carriage and pair. The woman got in and took her place beside him. Philip and Lvoff got into a cab, Anna Philipovna and I into another, the Lebedeffs into a third; the doors were banged to, and the cortège set off at a foot-pace, according to Russian custom.

It was a glorious spring day, as the morning had promised; not a cloud was to be seen in the deep-

blue, far-away sky. We had a long way to go; the Smolensk cemetery is on the Vassili Island, in the outskirts, and I felt pleasantly relieved as we set out. A drive, even at a foot-pace, and behind Roukoff, was delightful on a day like this. But at the entrance to the Lebedeffs' street, where we were detained for a moment by a passing line of carts, Anna Philipovna burst into tears, and in an agitated voice began to tell me the story of her life.

XI

When we reached the cemetery gates, approached by a broad road lined with little booths for the sale of wreaths, crosses and monuments, it was already past eleven o'clock; we had missed the first service. We drove in, and all got down at the beginning of the short avenue of birch-trees which leads up to the burial-chapel. Two men at once came out, carried in the light coffin, and set it down on trestles in a row with about thirty others; some, by their gorgeous palls and numerous wreaths, apparently belonging to wealthy families, others, of plain white wood and without a single ornament, to the very poor. In like manner the mourners presented a very mixed appearance, as they stood in a dense crowd round the coffins. It was some time before we, coming in from the sunlight and fresh air, could find out what

was going on; the heat was oppressive, and the sweet, thick smell of clouds of incense made me gasp, close my eyes, and lean back against the wall. In the corner, close to where we stood, the sale of images and candles was going on at a counter; the purchasers didn't lower their voices, and seemed to enjoy the bargaining. The chanting was sonorous—beautiful; unfortunately, my head began to swim; I grew faint, and was obliged to go out into the air. The others followed, questioning, a little alarmed.

'The service for the second batch will begin in a few minutes, but why should *we* wait? It takes two hours; it is sufficient if Roukoff remains,' declared Anna Philipovna.

'Quite so, but it will be as well to give him in charge to a priest,' remarked Lvoff; and he went back into the chapel.

'Excellent young man!' murmured Anna Philipovna; 'he thinks of everything. What we should have done without him, I don't know, as none of us are Orthodox. Don't stand there like that, with your hands in your pockets, Philip. I feel ashamed of you.'

'Take a turn with me, anywhere—among the graves,' I hastily suggested, not feeling able to bear an altercation just then; 'these people stare at us so!'

It was true; the avenue was bordered with benches, filled with sightseers, idlers, nurses, children, and old

people sunning themselves. Some had brought bread for the pigeons, which were wheeling about overhead, or strutting here and there after the crumbs, puffing out their breasts, and spreading their tails, as if they were used to being the centre of attraction. Everyone, however, was staring at us; and, in fact, we represented such different types that we made a sufficiently remarkable group. The Lebedeffs now produced some lunch in a paper bag, and sat down to eat it. Philip and I strolled away. The whole cemetery was planted with birch-trees; they were already in bud, but the ground was still covered with melting snow. We had to pick our way carefully between the pools.

'Lvoff's not such a bad fellow if he wouldn't get himself up in that ridiculous way. I don't understand you—this sudden sentimentalism. You couldn't bear even to hear of Roukoff a little while ago, and this morning there were tears in your eyes,' Philip suddenly started off.

'Oh, I'm not so frightfully logical as you; besides, they weren't for Roukoff, and in any case I'm not accountable to you for every emotion. But why do you keep your hands in your pockets?' I broke off with curiosity.

'To keep them warm, mademoiselle; and also partly not to compromise you by my shabbiness, you are so correct to-day,' he returned stiffly. 'Look!' he held up his arms and displayed long

rents in his shabby coat, through which the white wadding appeared. 'A-oo! A-oo! here we are!' he called out.

Lvoff was coming to look for us, in some anxiety for his spotless boots.

'I say, Philip Andreitch, Anna Philipovna thinks we ought to order a cross with a proper inscription for the grave; suppose we go and see about it?'

The two set off amicably together. Oh, how time dragged in that cemetery! We looked at the monuments to celebrated people; we avoided the bloated cemetery priests, who sat here and there like idols, or strolled leering about; we admired the babies; we chatted with the Lebedeffs, whom Roukoff had informed us were on the point of separating, but who were rather lavish of endearments in public, and Lvoff did his very best to help while away the time. He compared notes with Anna Philipovna about the foreign health resorts that Russians affect; he related how he had once cleaned himself out at Monte Carlo, and having by good luck won back enough to take him home again, had resolved henceforth to forswear gaming. He spoke of his intention of presently going to England, an 'experience which should form part of every enlightened Russian's education'; and he spoke eloquently about the works of Dickens. His politeness to Anna Philipovna was exquisite—he had seized her pronounced type from the first—and his manner to me would

have been equally perfect if he had been able to place me more precisely—if he had not been a little embarrassed. All the same, that, too, was very well; and, in short, in every moment of this trying time he acted in every respect correctly, and we all delighted in his feeling of satisfaction at it.

At last the long wait was over. Suddenly the doors of the chapel burst open, and the mourners began hurriedly coming down the steps into the sunshine, talking loudly, with raised hands and scandalized expressions. A prolonged murmur and sounds of confusion proceeded from the dim interior. The same misgiving seized us all; Lvoff and Philip made their way as quickly as they could up the steps.

'What is the matter?'

Anna Philipovna planted herself before some passers-by.

'An old man, madam, is making a frightful scandal, and calling out that they are burying his son like a pig; the priest is trying to calm him.'

Anna Philipovna and I looked at one another in horror, and in our apprehension we caught hold of one another's hands. But as we stood so Roukoff himself came out on to the top of the steps, held up by two strong men. He was calling out something blasphemous, but Lvoff and the priest whom he had engaged to come to the graveside followed close behind, and signed to us all to take no notice.

Roukoff several times endeavoured to slip from the hands that supported him to the ground, but he was borne to the carriage which was in waiting, put into it, and driven on into the cemetery, the little coffin hoisted up on the box. We all followed after.

'He is frightful, frightful,' murmured Lvoff, as he picked his way along with us.

The grave was squeezed in between others on slight hillocks: there was water in it, and the soil was yellow clay. We stood round on these hillocks while the coffin was lowered and the priest said the concluding words of the ceremony, throwing in a handful of earth. The lid of the coffin, as is customary at Orthodox funerals, was not put on till the last, and for one vivid moment, as the brocade pall was whisked away, I saw again the waxen features. But scarcely had the words 'earth to earth' been pronounced than Roukoff, with a yell, threw himself into the grave. There he writhed about bellowing. This scene so wrought on our already tense nerves that we with difficulty kept from screaming ourselves; and again Anna Philipovna and I held tightly to one another's hands.

'For God's sake stop it—stop it!' Lvoff said hoarsely to the priest: and the perspiration stood in drops on his forehead, which he repeatedly mopped with his silk handkerchief.

'Come, don't give way: it is the will of God,' said

the priest, leaning over into the grave. 'The gentleman has ordered for the deceased wreaths and a nice cross; he wishes to know what inscription you would like placed on it.'

He made a sign to his assistants; they dragged Roukoff from the grave. His mouth worked convulsively, but there were no tears in his eyes, and as soon as he got on his feet he groped round, moved up to Lvoff, and tried to seize his hand, slobbering out thanks to the *gentleman;* a poor man couldn't have expected it! This was the last straw. Lvoff broke away with a curse. Roukoff was immediately reconducted to the carriage, and we all trailed back again, sick at heart.

Later, as we were looking for a cab at the gates, Lvoff came up to apologize:

'That beast made me beside myself; I could stand anything but his thanks. Thank God this nightmare is over! Don't you all feel utterly exhausted? Can I do anything for you? Well, then, as there is nothing further to be done here, I would suggest to Philip Andreitch that we should go and lunch somewhere.'

'Yes, have some lunch; you'll feel better. How can we ever thank you? And we too,' Anna Philipovna added, motioning me to get into our cab —'we too are in need of refreshment.'

I could not, however, consider the day ended without telling the Zaroubins what had been done. I

went to them in the evening. Amélie Adrianovna was enraptured that the funeral was safely over, and learning at whose expense, she even bestowed a few words of condescending approbation on Anna Philipovna, while as for Lvoff, she simply overflowed in his praise, calling him twenty times *nôtre vrai chevalier*.

'Isn't this little Lvoff a knight—a perfect knight?' she demanded enthusiastically of Piotr Petrovitch, who was coming in to evening tea in a very gay humour, as if he had left some secret source of satisfaction on his writing-table.

'There is an English saying, "All's well that ends well"—the title of a play by Shakespeare, I think—is there not?' he asked me.

'But,' persisted Amélie Adrianovna, 'do you hear, Piotr? We have discovered a knight; and there is something we must beg of Miss Foster.'

'Please,' I requested.

'Why,' said she quickly, with her look of exaltation, 'we must continue the good work. It is the turning-point in this little one's life; his heart is now full of good and noble impulses. Miss Foster, you are younger than I—nearer—you must *save* him.'

I involuntarily turned to Piotr Petrovitch.

'But, Amélitchka,' he said, stirring his tea, 'the little one, as you call him, is not so very young; he must be older than Miss Foster herself, a good deal older—somewhere about eight-and-twenty,' he added,

smiling at me; 'his character, I should imagine, is formed.'

'Heaven forbid that I should refer to his character, which we know is excellent!' hastily replied Amélie Adrianovna, 'but for his energies there opens a totally new and unexplored field.'

I wondered whether Amélie Adrianovna alluded to her philanthropic colony, but I was too tired to find out what she did mean. While she talked on about Lvoff, I felt as if I belonged more to Piotr Petrovitch's sex than hers. He, too, didn't say anything; he seemed suddenly depressed. I fancied he wanted to be back at his table again. I got up to go.

'Yes, all's well that ends well,' he said, pursing his lips with a sigh at parting.

For me, however, not even Roukoff's son rested yet. True, I fell asleep the moment my head touched the pillow, but only to awake again with a start, to experience, as I afterwards noted, the phenomenon of retrospective fear—a poor label for the vivid event. It was between one and two in the morning, when there suddenly flowed into my mind the thought of him, the wet, yellow clay, the decomposing corpse between the frail boards, the water in the bottom of the grave, and the drip, drip above it; the waste of the cemetery muffled in fog in the outskirts, and the long lines of yellow lights stretching from it into the heart of snug Petersburg here around

me. I gradually became wide awake, and I felt a new and curious sensation of being absolutely alone, as if not quite alive or dead, but in a strange solitude, which I was conscious that the nearness of the sleepers close by didn't affect. *He* came to me; I couldn't see him, but he was close—so close. I remembered all that passed between us as he stood that afternoon in the window peeling the paper off the cocoa-tin; how I felt that I couldn't help him; and now he seemed to be suggesting that I *could* help him; that I must come to his grave; that he was buried alive; at any rate that I must come and see. He seemed to be challenging me to do so by all my perceptions, as I felt him near me, plain to my inner sense, though not to my eyes, pleading persistently. I think a quarter of an hour passed thus—I heard a clock strike—in this felt but invisible presence. I lay quite still, as if under a grip, afraid to stir, to make the least movement, lest something unknown should come nearer and really seize me. It wasn't dark in the room—there is light in the sky at this time all night in Petersburg —but my being able to distinguish the outlines of the walls and furniture brought me no comfort.

'Courage!' something seemed to whisper at last. The word revived me, as though my checked circulation were starting again, and various were my thoughts and remembrances. I sprang out of bed, made my way to the door without hindrance, turned

the key in the lock, and said firmly to my trembling self, 'I will lie down with this fear, hug it to me, and find out what bottom there is in it.' And, wonderfully, as in bed again I faced the idea of him, a great compassion for Roukoff's son welled up in my heart. I no longer feared the clammy grave, the rotting corpse slipped from my mind, and the tie—the tie between us—emerged, enduring and sacred. In the mysterious darkness that surrounded us we seemed to cling together with confidence. The certainty, the comfort of it, at last seemed to quiet him too. He left me—yes, he left me quite as if he had walked away and closed the door gently behind him; and I immediately slept.

XII

'Roukoff doesn't let the grass grow under his feet; he's kept me on mine all day,' Lvoff said from his easy-chair as he lighted a cigarette at Philip's. He had come an evening or two after the funeral to settle accounts. 'You are about the only people who have helped him whose names he hasn't mixed up in a charge of poisoning his son.'

'What!' we all exclaimed.

'Yes, he has dragged in everyone—simply everyone, from Prince L. to the local greengrocer. The clerk who examined his deposition said it was such an infernal bit of ingenuity, technically, that it meant

six weeks' work at least in unravelling it. Roukoff was a Bachelor of Law, you know.'

'Poisoning his son! But *when* did he do all this?'

Anna Philipovna almost bounded from her chair.

'The day after the funeral. It seems that directly he got home he started drinking with that woman; they finished six bottles of *vodka* between them. The police say she is a crony of his from his old lodging; she takes away the things people bring him. The two of them contrived this pleasant little surprise; and though it's preposterous on the face of it, it might have been serious for some of us if the case were not already, so to speak, in the hands of the police. They soon put a spoke in the wheel, and very neatly. They sent round the police doctor, who had certified the cause of death as consumption, and he informed Roukoff that he would have the body exhumed instantly to bear him out unless he withdrew the charge. He threatened him. *I* took a doctor to the boy, you know; besides, we could have the evidence of Professor Briansky. The whole thing is absurd, of course; but imagine the unpleasantness if all these names appeared in the papers in such a connection! This wouldn't suit Roukoff's book either; he was simply trying it on to extort hush-money. In the end he went to the police-office quietly enough, and there made a fresh deposition contradicting the first.'

'Oh, and to think that I paid for those photographs!'

Anna Philipovna's face was a study.

'Photographs of the boy in his coffin? *You* paid?' asked Lvoff.

'Yes, I was fool enough!'

'Then I admit *my* folly—after the evening service—for the mother—Roukoff begged me.'

The young man blushed up to his ears.

'Oh!' groaned Anna Philipovna, quite stricken, 'I *will* be careful in future; I'll never give again without inquiry as long as I live. It's a lesson.'

'It is,' responded Lvoff in heartfelt tones.

We were silent for a minute. Now would have been the time, according to Amélie Adrianovna, to put in a seasonable word to 'save' Lvoff; but strange to say I sat like a stone, and only said rather drearily:

'And I will never again yield to an emotion for the sake of the emotion as long as I live.'

'Ah, if I could teach *maman* that!' exclaimed Philip.

'Even that is better than having no emotions,' returned Anna Philipovna, but quite mildly for her, for the household was on its best behaviour; it had resolved that this was an occasion for showing gratitude to Lvoff.

The poodle had been washed, Philip had had his hair cut. There were cakes and sweets for tea. Sophie Ivanovna had considerately absented herself;

even Axsenia had put on a pink blouse and a coral necklace, and was all smiles. She had hated Roukoff from the first with ferocity—she was ready to adore Lvoff.

Anna Philipovna's retort, mild though it was, started one of those long and seemingly interminable discussions only possible where Russians are gathered together. At first it was between her and Philip, then Lvoff joined in; as for me, I sat listening in astonishment. It gradually dawned upon me that Philip, for some reason best known to himself, extraordinary as it may sound, had the same idea as Amélie Adrianovna—he was trying to 'save' the young man. I could hardly believe my ears—I could hardly believe it *was* Philip.

'Yes, and you know K. went to live with the Yakouts—actually to live at close quarters with those savages, to share their lives. And he found things to admire in them. He is such a man—an artist—that he was able to enter into *their* point of view. They lied, they stole, they were drunken; they took from him everything, and he didn't abuse them—he *understood*. Everyone else says "Yakouts!" as much as to say something filthy, and maybe spits on the ground; but K. says it with tenderness, and even with tears in his eyes—that is a man! I would as soon be K.,' declared Philip, 'as anyone in Russia.'

This set *me* off. I had not slept. The white nights of Petersburg now beginning excited me, and I was in

such a state of exaltation that, had I been a musician, I should have sat down to the keyboard and have improvised something wonderful and perhaps beautiful, of which the next day not one phrase would come from the end of my fingers. I was not a musician, but there were words instead of notes; instead of a keyboard there was a language. I improvised in this.

Anna Philipovna often said, when she was most irritated with her son, that his ineffectiveness specially provoked her because he had at any rate one talent —he could talk; he could persuade most people, herself excepted, that black was white. Philip was now talking, for the first time at any length in my hearing; and what beautiful things he said! How we kept it up between us, this harmonious flow! Lvoff was at first astonished; he stared at us, he stared at the rather tasteless, solidly-furnished drawing-room in which we sat; he stared at Anna Philipovna dozing off in her chair; finally, he gave us all up, he forgot his education, and he too plunged into the stream. Davidoff had said, 'Oh, Lvoff practises speaking—debating—that kind of thing, doesn't he?' I had a chance now to see what he could do. He spoke of his life, his future, his ambitions, the wide world, the many classes of people. He spoke of Russia, of Russians, of their lovable qualities, of their defects; and of the heart, the ideal heart, which, taking no account of the rough places in life, of cruel

disappointments, of filth, expands and embraces all, all alike, rich and poor, mean and ignorant, with warm and comprehending love. Amélie Adrianovna would have embraced her knight on the spot, crying that he was 'saved'; and on the spot her knight was indeed all that he hoped, all that he said, ready, I believe, had he entered the room at that moment, to embrace with Divine charity even Roukoff. And Philip, like a wise and elder brother, nodded comprehension, and beamed at him. Both the young men radiantly smiled at me, flushing, and I overflowed in sympathy back to them.

It was two o'clock in the morning before we thought of separating, and then only because Anna Philipovna woke up. I didn't know how weary I was till I almost fell in going out of the room. Lvoff followed me, and took his hat. We stood a moment in the hall, at the window into the garden, which was fairy-like with the full moon shining through the young green of the trees. Suddenly, as I looked into that silvery shimmer, something which had escaped me all the evening seemed to strike me. I said to him:

'In five years—three—if you remember this evening the recollection will annoy you. You will be making your career successfully, and what you have said will seem mere youthful folly. Isn't it so?' I held him with my eyes.

'Believe me, I am sincere *now*,' he answered earnestly.

At that moment Philip came out of his room with a candle to light him down the stairs. Their footsteps died away.

'Save him, if you can, Amél' Adrian'!' I murmured.

XIII

The story of Roukoff draws to a close. The burden of him now fell chiefly upon the unfortunate Lebedeffs. They could not get him out of their house, the police would not eject him, and they came to Anna Philipovna with their complaints and outcries two or three times a week. One day it was to report that he had engaged a young woman as companion-secretary at fifteen roubles a month; that she had a baby to keep, and he did not pay her. Another time it was to say that his wife had arrived from Tomsk, in response to a telegram in his son's name, and made him scenes every day that brought the neighbours round. Especially she had been provoked by coming face to face with a great lady—they still rolled up in their carriages—who had been in the Catharine Institute with her when she was 'a virtuous woman, which, thanks to you who have dragged me down, to-day I am not'—a true statement, it must be feared, since the Tomsk inquiries

had resulted in painful disclosures, one, that Roukoff's staple means of support was a house of ill-fame kept by his wife.

Somehow we didn't much commiserate the great ladies, but we *were* moved to indignation when we heard, for instance, of a poor widow bringing 'only two roubles,' with apologies, because she had 'four little children to support.'

Roukoff, it seems, had become a literary character. He wrote his own story nowadays, appended his name and address, pointed out to the charitable that here was an opportunity for benevolence, and paid for insertion in respectable weeklies. He appealed, for instance, to the students of Petersburg, who in former times would not have allowed such an enlightened person as himself to starve.

'I can't make out why more students don't come,' he confided, in a burst of confidence, to his wretched landlord; 'but times indeed are bad, for why don't these grandees give me a hundred roubles or so, instead of wretched driblets of two and three? *My* expenditure mounts up, I assure you.'

But bitterly as he complained, his eloquent paragraphs continued to bring great ladies and poor widows to the Lebedeffs' door. The poor people cut out some of these masterpieces of impudence and brought them to us; and we thus learned, among other things, that Roukoff had sold all he possessed to pay for the funeral, and that anyone who called

could see the photograph of his lamented and only son in his coffin.

'But this must be stopped, of course,' I exclaimed. 'We must write to the papers and expose him. That's what we should do in England; it's quite simple.'

'No one in this house shall write a line,' almost shouted Anna Philipovna in a panic, and she turned pale.

I looked at her in astonishment. What had happened?

'But why not? We can prove——'

'No one shall write a line. I shall not allow our names to appear. Do we know even now what this frightful man really is? He will drag us into the police-courts.'

'But it's horrible to think of this swindle going on —of these poor people being exploited!'

'No one shall write a line.'

Anna Philipovna was firm. I looked at Philip. He shrugged his shoulders.

'Then, madam,' I resumed, also firmly, 'one of us must personally explain to the editors of these papers that——'

But she wouldn't hear of that either; the mere idea of publicity made her piteous.

'Well,' said I, rising, '*something* must be done.'

But what? Should I go myself to the offices, or to whom should I apply? Not to Lvoff; the

Lebedeffs had been pestering him as they had pestered us. He knew about these begging articles, and that Roukoff was continuing his frauds on a larger scale, and he had left Petersburg—for London it was said—presumably to get rid of the affair. Not to the police themselves, who allowed it to go on; not to the *Z*aroubins or their friends; not to any of the circles whom it was proved Roukoff had exploited for four seasons in succession, and who had held their tongues. From whom, then, could I ask advice? I thought of Miss Lopatine, who knew the ins and outs of journalism.

'Ah,' said she, 'I knew how it would be when Loukin admitted having received your letter. He excused himself at first because it was written in French, and Frenchwomen were always plaguing him. But I reminded him that you had stated that you were an Englishwoman and a friend of mine. I said that the *Z*aroubins wondered he hadn't written. "Good heavens! Did you say an English lady, and a friend of yours and the *Z*aroubins'? Ah, but if you knew what trouble I have had with that Roukoff, what trouble I got the Russian *Times* into! Why, there was almost a lawsuit," he exclaimed piteously. I never saw a man look so foolish. So the murder was out. And now Roukoff is playing the same game with other papers. I'm afraid I can't advise you to interfere personally. *I* can't, you see; and in any case—but you might find some man who would

go and give them a piece of his mind. It will be difficult, and you are in an awkward position if you can't mention names. Yes,' said Miss Lopatine, her lovely timid eyes on mine, 'all you can do is to find a *man* who will frighten them.'

She sighed.

This sigh seemed the comment on her portrait as a young girl which hung opposite, at which I was momentarily looking. Miss Lopatine, interpreting my start, laid her hand affectionately on mine.

'Yes, I really was like that once,' she said simply.

Returning home meditatively, I on the way ran up against Natasha, who was crossing the pavement from a carriage into a shop.

'What have you done?' she cried to me. 'Don't dare to go near the Zaroubins; it is three days since Amél' Adrian' has refused to see anyone. But I took her by storm this afternoon, and, do you know, she is really in bed with a racking headache and pains all over her, and all on account of your horrible Roukoff. She says the whole affair will be in the papers; all her friends will be detained in town for a police case, and she'll never be able to look any of them in the face again.'

'You're exaggerating! Come!'

'No, indeed, I assure you. Go and see for yourself. This wretch is bringing an action against the people of the house for causing the death of his son by neglect, and the people of the house have cited

all of you to appear as witnesses. Good-bye—good luck.'

She waved her hand gracefully, grimaced, and tripped on into the shop. I hurried home, and ran up the stairs.

'Gently, gently! Stop a minute!' called Philip behind me. 'It's all right,' he panted as he came up; 'I've been to those newspaper offices.'

'You?'

'Yes; but don't say a word to *maman;* she would certainly die of fear. Not *I;* I don't care a straw. I mentioned no names, and I've given them a jolly fright—entirely in their own interests, of course—I told them that Roukoff had blackmailed the Russian *Times.*'

'I believe he tried to.'

'Of course he did; the story about Loukin is all over Petersburg.'

'Ah!'

'Oh, it's all coming out beautifully. Do you know how Roukoff began his campaign this time, for instance? By posting up a notice at the University that a blind man required a student to read to him! Oh, we shall have a complete Roukoff *dossier* soon, from the day he was born! We *have* been geese, mademoiselle.'

'We *have!*' I ejaculated.

Philip inserted his latchkey, and we passed into the house.

'Come in here a minute,' he said. 'Would you care to know where I get all this?' he grinned, when we had sunk into a couple of chairs in his room.

'Where from?' I demanded with curiosity.

'From the police.'

'The police!' I echoed in amazement.

'From the fountain-head. From how much money our dear master spent in Paris at the age of twenty-four, how he spent it, and where he got it, down to the names and occupations of such humble ministers to his needs as you and me, to the fact that he threw a bottle at his wife yesterday—they know everything.'

'Then why don't they put a stop—— ?'

'Ah, *that*—sh!'—Philip placed his fingers on his lips and looked mysteriously around—'*that* is impossible. Have you forgotten who is the dear master's brother?'

'The Governor of——'

'Sh! No names, sir, *if* you please; we sympathize with you—we greatly sympathize with you; if this case *should* come into Court, you shall have all our support; but, in short, you understand, where a high personage is concerned, to avoid scandal we, in short——' Philip imitated the important manner of a police functionary.

'Ah!' I exclaimed; 'you're joking? No? Did they really say that?'

'Those very words. You recognise the touch of the paternal hand? You have heard before, perhaps, of the danger of compromising high personages? Let us rest on our laurels. There is nothing more to be said.'

Philip and I looked at one another in silence for a moment. We were each suddenly embarrassingly aware of a whole subject in the background, palpitating with absorbing interest, of which we never did say anything.

'*You* went to the police?' I asked at last.

'I went with poor Lebedeff; as he can't get rid of Roukoff in any other way, he is obliged to give up his house. He went to inform the police of his change of address, and also to get some advice about this preposterous accusation.'

'Ah! that's what I don't understand. Where's the foundation for that?'

'Foundation! Well, if any is needed, by law a lodger is entitled to three samovars a day. Roukoff only had two, and he swears that the boy died for want of boiling water.'

'Good gracious!'

'Yes, we may think ourselves lucky he's not trumped up something against *us*. You remember the cocoa we took that day? His net is wide. To be on the safe side we had better all leave Petersburg—leave him in possession.'

'Well, *maman*,' cried he, throwing open the door,

as a rustling was heard outside; 'I've been trying to explain to mademoiselle how things are done in our beautiful country, and she thinks of immediately returning to England.'

I held out my hand to Anna Philipovna with a smile.

Davidoff, of course, had the last word. I was in his library while he was hunting on the shelves for something which he had promised me, and I took up the current number of the *Historical Journal*, which was lying prominently on a table. It fell open at the following extract relating to our hero from the reminiscences of a certain A. E. E., which Miss Lopatine had told me of the day before. The writer, after recounting some of Roukoff's enormities twenty years back, wound up: 'He not only wasn't ashamed and didn't hide his disgraceful adventures, but he boasted and was proud of them, as other people are proud of their great deeds and the creations of their wisdom or talent. Thus, he related to the judge many of his adventures abroad, and boasted to him that he had been in nearly all the prisons of Europe. These adventures might furnish curious material for a novelist like Ponson du Terrail, and he himself affords a very interesting subject for speculation to the psychologist.'

I laid the journal down, and began to softly pace the floor, laid with cork, and vibrating under one's

step like the floor of a first-class railway carriage in motion.

Davidoff turned round presently with something in his hand.

'I don't find what we want, but here at last is that pamphlet of Roukoff's I told you of. I see I wasn't mistaken—a trifle out in the date—and with it is actually one of his begging letters, endorsed by me, April 21st, 1875.'

Davidoff replaced the letter in the pamphlet, and smiled. 'I must have more shelf room. Double rows are detestable,' he murmured.

THE SECRET OF THE UNIVERSE

THERE is no need, I am sure, to explain to the readers of the *Leader* who Constantine Sylvester was; but perhaps there are readers of other dailies who won't recognise that paper's daring war correspondent and chief glory under the name. To explain who Barry was is my object in taking pen in hand at this moment, for no one outside the Sylvester circle—in London, at any rate—can possibly have heard of him. My rash promise to the Sylvesters to give him a niche—to make him known—I naturally never fulfilled; I couldn't, for the very simple reason that I hadn't one-tenth of the talent my too partial friends persisted in ascribing to me. If I had had, nothing—no, nothing—should have kept me from pouncing on ink and paper, and producing that imaginary *chef d'œuvre* which was to salve all wounds, make up for everything, and as its triumphant climax really bury Barry, or, at least, as Mrs. Sylvester urged, lay his unburied ghost.

'If you don't write about Barry, if you don't make something out of him, something amusing or pathetic—it doesn't matter which, whatever you can do best, but *something*, my dear child—I'll never forgive you,' Sylvester used to say to me with his manner of gloomy persistence. 'You positively must do him; I insist upon it. I don't look for any other reward—compensation, we know, isn't to be thought of—but this I do look forward to, the story of Barry, written by you. It's the only poetical justice that could come into the case now. Do Barry you must and shall.'

'It will lay his wretched ghost as nothing else can; please, if only for the sake of that, oblige us,' Mrs. Sylvester added significantly. 'It really is—ah, don't we know it?—all we have to look forward to!'

I felt that if this was all, there was indeed little for them; but I of course gave the required promise. I asseverated my excellent intentions, as if one more asseveration was really all that was needed. This was, of course, in our comparatively light-hearted days; we could not have spoken so flippantly later on. I have said that if I had had the necessary talent, nothing should have prevented my then and there making this return—beggarly as it was—for all we had suffered and were suffering—well, nothing except the one other consideration that I hadn't, at that time, the right perspective for the sketch.

I stood too near what I wanted to paint—positively in the very midst—and, as I explained to Sylvester, that would be the ruin of any picture; I should make it out of drawing from the beginning. He might laugh at my timorous precautions, my anxiety to secure always the chosen, the best conditions —the psychological moment, as the cant phrase is; he who worked best in molten material, whose gems dropped out under fire, might be allowed a smile at what he was pleased to consider mere nervousness. I begged to remind him that I had not had the training of the *Leader* war correspondent.

Well, I have the desired perspective now. The Sylvesters are gone—Barry, poor Barry, himself is gone. All that is left is a vista—a perspective; and now that my friends are no longer here to see the result, to exclaim over it, to joke over it, and sigh over it, I do actually find myself sitting down and posing the unlaid ghost of Barry for a portrait. I haven't any more talent than in those old days, but it's no good waiting; I will do as I promised long ago—try to draw Barry as I saw him, my pen loitering and dragging a little, maybe, because the Sylvesters, who alone could tell if the likeness is a good one, are no longer here to judge; and because, as happens sometimes when we turn to look back in life, we see the dark clouds stealing up which hid the early sunny landscape, and our thoughts slacken, and our eyes fill with tears.

I

It was, of course, at their picturesque house that I first met him, in Hampstead, before the melancholy business began, before anyone suspected that things were about to go so dreadfully wrong with the poor old fellow. Sylvester, in his light-hearted way, had given him a general invitation for Saturday evening —an attention of which he had at first unremittingly availed himself. He must have been bored, I think, because he spoke very imperfect English, and was very deaf, and because people who spoke Russian turned up rarely, and when they did, somehow seemed to fight shy of him; and English people didn't want to speak to him at all. But he sat on all the evening, just the same, as if he were quite the centre of anything interesting that was going on; and when any question was whispered about him—he was far too strange a figure, even among many other strange ones, to escape notice—the invariable answer, 'Oh, Sylvester picked him up in Transcaucasia,' settled the matter. Sylvester was always picking people up. They came from the East and the West and the North and the South; but I venture to say he had never in his life had such a find as Barry.

I was attracted myself at first sight by the venerable-looking person, very thin, clothed all in gray, who might have sat for any portrait of benevolent

age, and who bore a striking resemblance to the Scotch gamekeeper in that picture of Landseer's; and I drew down fate on my head with the question:

'Who, pray, is that very Scotch-looking Scotchman sitting silent over there? Ought not someone to say something to him?'

Sylvester afterwards reverted with groans to his cheerful 'Come and see'; and he declared that he was without the smallest presentiment of possible misfortune till much later in the evening, when he beheld me under the spell of Barry, even as was the Wedding Guest under that of the Ancient Mariner, when the shrill voice of the man from Transcaucasia was compelling the unwilling attention of everyone within earshot, and Mrs. Sylvester was bearing down on him in wrath.

Of course, I had immediately asked Barry how, with his Scotch physiognomy, he came to be a Russian, and that set him off upon his ancestry.

His grandfather, pure Scotch, of Barry, in Kincardineshire, from which place he took his name, had settled in Danzig as British Chaplain. He left one son, a boy of eleven, who was driven from the town during some political disturbance. A Russian apothecary, taking pity on his forlorn condition, adopted him and educated him to be a doctor. As ship's surgeon he sailed three times round the world, and in the course of his travels was wrecked off the coast of Brazil and hospitably entertained by a coffee-

planter, who pressed upon him his only daughter, aged eleven, and her large dowry. The ship's surgeon, in relating the story, used to say: 'She was a child, she did not understand what was love, and I had not seen enough of the world; how could I make such a marriage?' So he sailed away, and in course of time settled in Russia and married a German. Of this union our Barry was the seventh pledge.

'I myself,' said Barry, 'know little of the English, and less of the Scotch. I have just come over to this country to publish my philosophical and scientific writings, which I am not allowed to publish in Russia. No; beyond Sylvester, whom I regard as my benefactor, and the people of the house where I lodge, I know no English—unless I may count the Chaplain's wife at Irkutsk, who was an Englishwoman. She was not an agreeable character; she could not sleep at night, and used to get into her carriage and make her coachman drive her about till dawn. One morning, when she alighted at her own door, she found that the coachman was frozen to death on his box. He had died driving, and the horses had come home of themselves. No, she was not a pleasant lady! These are all the English I know. What you say about my Scotch appearance interests me very much.'

I ventured to express a hope that his impressions of our people might become favourable on a nearer acquaintance, and was startled by the reply:

'When we are happy our impressions will be

favourable. The day my book is given to the world will be the happiest day of my life. I have looked forward to it for twenty-five years.'

It was at this moment, before I had time to find the appropriate answer, that Mrs. Sylvester bore down upon us; but already my first impression of Barry was gone—gone the superficial likeness to Landseer's gamekeeper; I simply couldn't find it. During the progress of his circumlocutory, halting, shrill talk, much interrupted by a dry cough, the Russian in him came out. As I turned away, I chiefly carried in my memory two slanting slits of eyes, liquid, with brownish whites, and the one or two accompanying characteristics which my long frequenting the Sylvesters' cosmopolitan reunions had taught me to recognise in some of Barry's compatriots. Of German I saw nothing: I subsequently discovered there was very little of the German in my new acquaintance.

II

On Sunday morning, at breakfast—I had stayed the night—the Sylvesters with one accord challenged me as regards Barry.

'It's extraordinary,' said Blanche, 'you were never so interested in any one in our house before. One couldn't have imagined such a thing. When I saw Koko leading you up to Barry, I thought: "Now,

what is he sacrificing her for? Poor thing! she'll be bored to death. It's a shame to take such advantage of good-nature." I had a scolding all ready for Koko when he should come near me, and a little later I looked, and there you were, fixed, fascinated, absorbed, while the philosopher's voice grew louder and shriller. You know, dear Emmie, that you really behaved very badly in giving that deaf Russian a treat such as he probably hasn't had for years. You destroyed my party; no one else could hear himself speak.'

'Oh, come,' interposed Sylvester; '*you* know that nothing pleases you so much as to see everyone enjoying himself in his own way. The question is, What was Emmie enjoying? That is what I am curious to hear. What did Barry tell you, Emmie? You must confess that you, at least, didn't have a chance to say much.'

'He began at the beginning; he told me about his Scotch ancestry—the adventures of his grandfather,' I replied, smiling.

'I'm sorry his grandfather was Scotch'—Blanche looked pensive—'it explains his persistence. Russians are not persevering. But who was the grandfather?'

'British Chaplain at Danzig.'

'Worse and worse!' Blanche shook her head. 'That explains the philosophy.'

'Why do you shake your head?' said Sylvester to his wife. 'It is a very interesting combination. And what else did he tell you, Emmie?'

'That you were his benefactor, and that the only other English person he knew was a lady in Irkutsk, who let her coachman freeze to death.'

'He has no sense of humour, Koko.' There was a depth of reproach in Blanche's voice.

Sylvester turned wholly to me.

'Don't mind her. Go on, Emmie; tell us some more.'

'Oh, he said he had passed most of his life in exile, and that for the last twenty-five years he had been writing a great philosophical-scientific work, and that the day it was published would be the happiest in his life. Will it ever be published?' I inquired doubtfully.

'Yes; it is being printed, in Russian. It's going through the press now.'

'Have you seen any of it?'

'Not a line.'

'You have faith?'

'Oceans!'

'Eat your breakfast, children,' interrupted Mrs. Sylvester. 'Emmie had no supper last night, on account of the philosopher; don't let her be deprived of breakfast as well.'

'Didn't you have any supper, really? I'm awfully sorry! You mustn't make a martyr of yourself for my strange guests; you know the ways of the house.'

Sylvester was suddenly remorseful, and began arranging quite a little procession of dishes round

my plate. We attacked them in silence and in earnest, but he soon let fall his knife and fork.

'The fact is that you are quite right: Barry *is* interesting,' he beamed—Mrs Sylvester in dumb show intimating that now I was free to get on as fast as I could; Koko wouldn't taste anything more, he was off—'Barry is a remarkable person; he has led a remarkable life. What I did in bringing him over here from that hole in Transcaucasia any one would have done—anyone who had seen what the place was for such a man, especially when his luggage consisted chiefly of the manuscript of this great work of his, which there was only so much waste-paper.'

'A manuscript of which you haven't seen a line,' Blanche murmured.

'Dear!' Sylvester abstractedly gazed at the teasing woman, and continued: 'Barry will reap the reward of his life-long labours, will have a rest after his life-long struggle with injustice, here, in England. He will have a career now, at last, in a free country. Even if this work—I have no ground for supposing it—should prove valueless or of little value, he will have had what is due to every man, what may not be withheld—a chance. I brought over Barry simply to give him a chance.'

'Of course you did. Drink your coffee, Koko. If you had had all the chances you have lavished on other people——' Mrs. Sylvester's gaze, wandering

round the room, paused at the faded curtains, and she sighed. 'Koko is a dangerous person,' she went on to me. 'I can't tell how it happens, but, perfect dragon as he is for the *Leader*, in detecting lies and impostures and feebleness generally, and avoiding bores like scorpions, by his own fireside he's nothing but a poor helpless victim, and if it wasn't for his wife, whose care in this respect I know he despises, he wouldn't have at this moment a roof over his head or the good breakfast he is neglecting.'

Sylvester drank some coffee, and resumed, impatiently waving his hand:

'Yes, suppose the philosophy nonsense—suppose his deep study of speculative science wasted, still, Barry's other work has been of value. I have met men in Russia, men of mark of a succeeding generation to his, men of European reputation, who told me with emotion that they owed practically everything—everything in a progressive way—to him. It was he who set them on the right path, he who gave them the shove. To that generation he was, as an influence, everything. If he has outlived his glory, if he is unknown, or known only as a name to the younger men, is he on that account to be the less honoured? His first work, "The Way," sold in thousands, was in every thinking young person's hands in its day; and I can understand that. I felt the same moral uplifting myself the first time I met him, now some twenty years ago, on my Siberian

expedition. It has not recurred this time; but I am no longer young. It was to the young that Barry specially appealed. When I saw Emmie's absorption last night—forgive me, child—I sighed to myself, and thought "How young she is, and how happy!"'

We all sighed.

'Well, well,' said Mrs. Sylvester impatiently, 'I know well enough that all your swans are geese; but Emmie hasn't told us a word of all this. Honestly, Emmie, was the sort of charm that Koko describes the charm that attracted you to Barry, or what was it? I don't allow for a moment that what you have said explains the amazing fact at all.'

I tried to think and put my impressions clearly, but I knew that I must fail; there are impressions whose essential charm is that they are incommunicable. But Mrs. Sylvester, who liked everything to be in a hard, dry light, would never allow this; and thus, at the very beginning, while I paused a moment, seeking words, I found myself pledged to Barry as to a sign of just exactly what is most impossible to drag forward, to produce.

'Barry didn't try to interest, or convert, or inspire,' I said: 'he just talked on and answered my questions; but he seemed to me single-minded, made all of one piece, to carry with him an individual and new atmosphere—new to me—to be oblivious of any other. This in your parlour, dear Blanche, on a Saturday evening, you will admit, is wonderful;

so, liking this atmosphere, I wanted to get more and more into it. I was, I suppose, carried away. Yes, there was a charm. If it wouldn't make you laugh, I should say that he struck me as a very *good* man,' I ended timidly.

'He *is* a good man,' affirmed Sylvester.

'He's something precious, but frail, that one fears to lose,' I ventured.

'He gives one'—Sylvester took it up—'an exhilarating sense of——'

Mrs. Sylvester rose precipitately.

'And he's a most awful bore. I warn both of you that one day he'll irritate you to the degree he does me. I leave you the field now. I only beg, you two babies, that you'll eat some breakfast. Infatuated with the wonderful being as you are, you've let it get perfectly cold.'

'Well, he is wonderful, all the same,' said I shamefacedly, as the door shut on Blanche; 'and I expect his book will be wonderful.'

'Wonderful! wonderful!' assented Sylvester, with sudden depression.

III

I have no remembrance of even the mention of Barry's name for a considerable time after this; but I very well recall how it flashed out, when I dropped

in at the house in Hampstead one wintry afternoon, on a trifling errand, with the hope—I didn't live in Hampstead—of a cup of tea. I must confess that the beginnings of the Barry chronicle come back to me a little dimly. I have to grope for them. There were others, whose affairs occupied us all more urgently in those days; still, I remember this particular afternoon well enough, because, if, though I didn't remark it, that breakfast conversation had been an ominous sign, this tea would have shown a person really awake—Mrs. Sylvester, for instance—that calamity was already upon us.

Especially present to me is the air of gloom about the little ivy-covered house as I came in—gloom which had nothing to do with that of the weather, or the fact that the lamps hadn't yet been brought in. Blanche was sitting disconsolate by the tiled hearth, the tea-things were on the table, the kettle was singing on the crow, the buttered muffins and crumpets reposed in their dish in the fender. But the master was absent; his heavy, rather shuffling, but rapid tread could be heard to and fro in the room, which was his writing-room, above.

'What's the matter?' I came to the point.

'It's all wretched and miserable. I could strangle Barry.' Blanche's eyes gleamed, and her handsome profile looked menacing in the firelight.

'Barry? Why?'

'Koko won't leave his room till he's made out a

review of that atrocious, fantastic, impossible, and utterly unintelligible book. Review it, indeed! Who *could* give any sensible account of the monstrosity?'

'How long has he been trying?'

'Days and nights.'

'Oh!'

'Yes, and he had to ask me—*me*—to help him, and I couldn't understand a line of the gibberish. You remember the story about the Douglas Jerrolds and "Sordello"? We were in the same case. Koko's face as he scanned mine for a verdict, and his relief —oh!'

'But why must Constantine review it? He's not a reviewer.'

'Ah! why indeed? No one else would. It's just his absurd, his extravagant good-nature. When Barry wrote to him from his hole, and Koko, without saying a word to me, wrote back advising him to come over with the precious nonsense, Koko promised, when it should be published, to send it off with a flourish of trumpets in the *Leader*. He promised —*he*—to do such a thing. And there's not a soul he could ask to do it; and he's honest, and there you have it. Just listen to him now.' Mrs. Sylvester held up a finger. 'He's just a raving lunatic in a cage.'

'Let's go and bring him down.'

'No, no; he turned me out of the room after lunch. He said he wouldn't rest till the thing was done.

He's tried it metaphysically, mathematically, scientifically, by the rules of common-sense——'

'And now he's taking it philosophically! Hark!'

The hurried steps had stopped; something creaked, opened and shut. We fancied we could hear the pen scratching over paper.

'Ah, he won't be long now; he's got an idea. I'm longing for tea; you are, I'm sure.' Blanche jumped up and rang for lights. 'He'll scold me,' she said, brightening up, when she had settled down again. 'The fact is, that when Koko is miserable I am helpless—I am simply paralyzed. I sit all day, my head in my hands, unable to do a thing. Nothing annoys him more. He wants to know what I would say if he couldn't work when I had a headache. Just like a man, isn't it? Sometimes I think they don't understand on purpose. When you have a husband—— Sh! He's coming. Surely, he can't have done it already. Not a syllable.'

Sylvester was, in fact, heard running downstairs. Blanche bustled about. When he came in, the lamp was lit, the fire was bright, the tea was made, the muffins and crumpets were hot and delicious, and in addition a frosted cake—Sylvester liked sweet things—shone invitingly from its china dish; two smiling hypocrites were stirring their untasted tea, as if no such things as philosophy and reviews existed.

But Sylvester was gloomy, very gloomy; even our cheerfulness and the frosted cake failed to produce

an effect immediately. He put his head on his hand and sighed once or twice as he looked at it and at us.

'After tea,' he said, 'I want you both to help me. Can you stay, Emmie? I want you to do some copying for me. There's an article that ought to be sent off at once.'

'You've done it?' cried Mrs. Sylvester, putting lumps of sugar rapidly into his cup.

'I'm going to make Barry do it. I took the precaution, when he brought me the book, of asking him to mark what he considered the most pregnant passages—the gist. So, as I really can't conscientiously say I understand them, and as I've no more time to waste, we must just let them speak for themselves—some of them—he marked a good deal. He will be disgusted, but what can I do?'

'He ought to be eternally grateful. Who else would give his time and worry himself as you do?'

'Oh, I've had his German translation to help me.'

'What, is there a German translation?'

'Yes, in manuscript.'

'Oh, can I see it? I long to try if I can make out something. Do let me run and get it, Constantine,' said I imploringly.

'Go, Koko, fetch it for her, and the book too. She's the only person we shall ever find *longing* for it,' laughed Blanche, and Sylvester went upstairs.

He returned with three octavo volumes in buff

wrappers and a mass of manuscript stitched inside American cloth covers.

'Begin at the beginning,' said he, pushing the latter over to me, 'and have some cake.'

'The Secret of the Universe' stared at me in bold printed letters from the title-page. Turning over the leaves at random, I came to Part IV.—The Metaphysic of Pure Being, and read aloud:

'The inanimate is vitalized by the animate in virtue of its own potential animation: the animate is devitalized by the inanimate in virtue of its own potential inanimity.'

'Oh, that's easy. We know where we are when he's quoting other people; it's when he begins himself that one gets hopelessly fogged,' Sylvester said —'when he begins to mix up all the sciences and all the philosophies, and to deduce from premises one doesn't seem to have got hold of. But, of course, none of *us* can judge. One requires special training.'

'Better take a part home with you, Emmie—whichever you like,' added Mrs. Sylvester persuasively.

I looked in a frightened way from one to the other. We all burst out laughing.

'Come, will you copy my review?' said Sylvester, and he went upstairs again to finish it.

So we copied it, and he sealed it up, and—it was by this time a frosty starlight night—we sallied forth with it to the post; and as we went, looking up at the stars, we grew light-hearted, and made very merry

over the 'Secret of the Universe.' I dare say we each in our own way fancied we divined it pretty well at that moment. But at the pillar-box Sylvester had another access of gloom. He gave the long envelope to me. His kind eyes had a moist gleam behind his spectacles.

'Poor Barry! You drop it in, Emmie—for luck,' he said.

IV

'By the way,' Blanche said to me when next we were together, 'did Barry by any chance mention to you that he had a wife?'

'A wife? No!'

'These geniuses! Well, I felt sure he wouldn't have alluded to such a trifle. I annoyed Koko by saying so. "Why should he?" he said. Koko is another genius.'

We were sitting near the window, for the light, at the close of one of the few fine days at this season, with a small table between us heaped with needlework. We were very busy; the talk came in snatches.

'Is she here—in London?' I asked, sparing half my surprise for Blanche's daring performance with a pair of scissors.

'Of course; dragged from that place. The poor

woman told me that she implored him—the first time in her miseries she'd begged anything—to have mercy on himself and herself, and let them at least die where they were. It seems that they had some sort of little employment or allowance they could have lived on.'

'And he wouldn't?'

'With the chance of publishing his precious work dangling before him? Oh no! And the journey—poor woman!' Blanche paused to thread her needle. 'It seems they came in the most circuitous, the most uncomfortable way, staying weeks in wretched lodgings. I can never imagine why. I call them the "Babes in the Wood." They adore Koko, poor things; but when I think it's his doing that they are here, and that it may end in a tragedy——'

'*What* may end in a tragedy?'

Sylvester had been sawing up planks in the garden; he was looking in at us through the partly-opened window; his broad shoulders quite shut out the fading light.

'Go away! go away!' cried Blanche; 'we are abusing you.' But he came round and in at the door. 'We are talking about Barry.'

He sat down.

'The way women sew,' he said, taking up a piece of stuff with thumb and finger; 'it's so slight—so frail.'

'The way *men* sew, as if they were making tents

or boots. Koko, Barry *didn't* mention his Wilhelmina's existence. Tickets for Duse, please; I'll take the money now.' Blanche held out her hand. 'It's a bet,' she explained, 'and I was right, as usual.'

Sylvester put his hand in his pocket mechanically, and drew it out again.

'Madame Barry is quite uninteresting,' he said, colouring.

'These geniuses!' Blanche nodded at me.

'A worthy woman,' continued Sylvester. 'You may like her, Emmie.'

Blanche smiled and frowned at her work. She laid it down suddenly.

'We simply must do something for Wilhelmina,' she said. 'It isn't a question of her being interesting. You are dreadfully unfair sometimes, Koko. When you find that someone is commonplace you just chuck them over; and yet you yourself are to blame for exalting them in the beginning. It will be so with the Barrys. I know you well. You get all there is to get out of people, and then——'

'Barry isn't commonplace,' Constantine interrupted with decision.

Blanche turned to me.

'Do *you* know anyone who wants Russian lessons who would pay, or who would teach English in exchange? It would give poor Wilhelmina a little diversion in the intervals of cooking for her genius; and, besides, would bring in a little money. I fancy

they are getting to the end of their savings. The journey and the book must have made a good hole, and I need hardly say that there have been no returns.'

Blanche glanced Sylvester's way to show that she didn't let *her* genius off; and Sylvester, whose conscience answered to the slightest pressure, shifted uneasily. I murmured that I should like to learn Russian.

'Capital!' Sylvester swung round and laid a detaining hand on my work. 'Capital! Learn Russian and teach her English.'

'But can I? Isn't it difficult to learn and to teach?'

'It's absurdly easy. In two years you will speak.'

'These geniuses! Don't believe him.'

Mrs. Sylvester approved, however. We sketched gorgeous plans—linguistic castles in the air, and were giving the last touch to a dizzy edifice when Blanche cried that Wilhelmina herself was coming up the path.

'She's not interesting, but she was well educated; her accent's all right,' Sylvester tossed at me as he hurriedly escaped.

Madame Barry, without a suggestion of manner, was quite the most polite person, except some Japanese, I had yet come across—painfully polite. How pathetically her broad shining face beams at me now across these years! She wore a sort of

Norfolk jacket of black cashmere, loose, like a man's, with wide, straight sleeves, and had very square-toed boots. Her eyes were small, her nose was snub, her hair was parted in the middle, Dutch-doll fashion, and a twist of it stuck out at the back like a tea-pot handle. A worthy woman! Yes, it was written in every line of her ample person.

The visit went off very well. We talked of the 'Secret of the Universe.' I remember her remark that recognition seemed slow in coming in England, and Blanche's grimace at me. I remember also her amusing account of her household difficulties—she spoke hardly any English—and the glimpse she gave, in saying how odd it seemed, after years spent in prison, and under police surveillance, to have at last found a home in London under the roof of a policeman.

'He's a very amiable person,' she said, 'and quite enjoys a chat with Alexander; but his wife has her peculiarities. She, it appears, distrusts foreigners. Just when he is enjoying himself she calls out, or strides in, and drags the poor man away.'

Barry himself dropped in later, and Sylvester joined us again. The talk was general, and, as it seemed to me, it grew inspired. We breathed a rarer air, and, as it were, saw really clearly to a great distance. Barry flung, and Sylvester caught and returned; the ball, never once let fall, mounted higher and higher. Blanche and I were winged in our turn; we all fairly

glowed at one another. I don't remember anything more vivid, more exhilarating. Afterwards, indeed, in going back to this evening, we agreed that we had been to blame, as if we had been in a conspiracy to flatter and delude the poor old people; but it was rather, I think now, as if we had been under a spell. We all, even Blanche, looked to Barry as if we believed him the successful person we wanted him so much to be. It was strange. It comes back to me in particular, how charming Sylvester was, how touching I found the younger man's deference to the elder, how I liked to see our Sylvester sitting at Barry's feet. Blanche — for Blanche — was not satirical; she made Madame Barry happy. She found a moment, in the hall, to arrange the Russian lessons, and I was happy in listening to the philosopher's strange talk, and watching Sylvester's face grow beautiful as it grew enthusiastic. We were under a spell.

'You were splendid!' I could not resist saying to Sylvester, as, leaving the house, I met him coming back from escorting the Barrys to their train. 'Dear Constantine, you made them happy.'

'You think so?' He was glad, like a child. 'Yes, they were happy,' he said shyly, with a look half askance; and, though it was dark where we stood, it seemed to me that he flushed.

After he had turned away I remember that I called out 'Dear Constantine!' to the listening street.

V

The Barrys lived at Willesden, at the end of a row of little red-brick houses, with stone facings, and opposite a Baptist chapel. Retreat Road was the appropriate address. The policeman's wife opened the door, and ushered me—sternly, I thought—into her own parlour, an apartment with a green drugget, and abounding in plush photo-frames, chimney ornaments, and brackets. What a contrast was the Barrys' flat overhead to which she called up, in a harsh voice, from the foot of the stairs! Linoleum on the floor, a table, six bent-wood chairs, a stove, and a lamp comprised the modest furniture of the front-room; and how the peaceful atmosphere, impressive as evening bells ringing over quiet fields, made one feel instantly and happily at home!

Madame Barry proved a patient and conscientious teacher, but before the hour was up, shuffling steps were heard in the passage outside. She looked confused, and blushed, good woman!

'My husband—he is so impatient to talk to you. Would you mind if he had the lesson to-day instead of me? I can listen and pick up something,' she said hurriedly.

Barry appeared, extremely neat, as usual, in his light-gray suit, in the doorway.

'Ah, you see, I keep good time.' He was watch in hand. 'Madame Barry has told you I would like some conversation with you.'

I signified that it would be very agreeable. Barry, with a contented smile, sat down, and drawing his feet in their carpet slippers under his chair, stroked his beard with his thin hand, his narrow eyes twinkling excitedly. With increasing eagerness, he spoke for nearly an hour, while Madame Barry, who had quickly stolen away, came and went and smiled upon us, and rattled crockery in the kitchen. He seemed to me to talk of everything in heaven and earth in his shrill voice, interrupted with coughing—especially of principles and aims and sufferings. But somehow it was not inspiring, as it had been the night at the Sylvesters; and by-and-by I found myself considering Barry objectively as an interesting study, here in this bare, colourless little room, looking out through Nottingham lace curtains on to dreary bricks and mortar, while he talked on of things that had happened long ago in Russia and in Siberia, of human needs, of the need for brotherly feeling, of the need for us all to unite, always to draw closer. It was like an accompaniment to something. To what? And, indeed, I was weary as at the end of an over-long concert, when Madame Barry invited us to bring our chairs to the table. It was a weariness of the spirit.

'Poor woman!' I thought, as I looked at her, and

then, seeing her broad, beaming face and little, light eyes, shining with love: 'Happy, happy woman!'

The plain deal table was spread with dainties in a truly astonishing manner—little saucers containing viands, green, red, brown, all colours; these were cold, but there were other delicacies under covers which let escape savoury steam. There was, of course, a tray with tea, and this afternoon repast began with smoked herrings, and wandered on through messes of all kinds of vegetables, which I had difficulty in recognising, to the richest almond pastry. I did my best, but could see that it was considered a poor performance by my hostess. My host paid no attention to his wife's efforts, and I don't think he noticed what was on the table. He took little sips from a tall glass, half filled with red wine and water, and tried to resume his talk, often gently reproved by Wilhelmina, who perhaps divined my incipient headache. She treated him, in fact, just like a spoiled child, and, as it were, kept putting his toy out of reach. She talked of the Sylvesters, and Barry, whose attention had wandered, became animated again.

'That man,' said he, 'has a heart of pure gold; his intellect is perhaps not of the first order, but his heart is glowing and noble, his nature is spiritual. What I was saying to you of national prejudice—taking as an illustration our good landlady down-stairs—could never have applied to him.'

This naïve reference to Sylvester's failure to comprehend the 'Secret of the Universe' diverted me immensely, but Madame Barry was speaking:

'I don't quite make out the character of Mrs. Sylvester; it is difficult to understand the English character. We were more intimate at first; she was very kind, she found us this lodging. I thought I should love her. I have not seen so much of her lately, but I think she has a good disposition.'

'Surely,' I hastened to say.

'Yes? Well, I shall hope to understand her,' said the good Wilhelmina, with a sigh. 'I think I understand you better, mademoiselle.'

She had evidently taken a fancy to me; it was not easy to escape her overwhelming hospitality. My aching hand testified to the warmth of the philosopher's parting clasp all the way to the station.

Blanche laughed heartily over my account of this afternoon, but shook her head over the little feast.

'Don't be afraid; I'll protect you,' she said. 'Wilhelmina has the soul of a housewife, and I fancy that almost the only pleasures in her troubled life have been just such occasional culinary outbreaks. While the exiles discussed endlessly, their wives must have been getting up rival tea-parties. The little survival of housewifely pride is touching. They adore Koko, don't they?'

'Oh yes; but they are a little afraid of *you*.'

'That's right.' Blanche laughed. 'I must tell

you of one trait in the good soul's character,' she went on: 'she has need of small idolatries outside her great worship. Barry is her god; she wanted to make me an idol. She began to say such preposterous things to me when I first knew her that I couldn't look her in the face. You don't like that sort of extravagance any better, and so—well, I warn you.'

'I'm not afraid.'

Blanche and I exchanged appreciative glances.

VI

I went out to Willesden every Monday and listened to Barry—it only amounted to that. He didn't make any progress in English because he was always too absorbed in his thoughts to listen to corrections, and almost too deaf to hear them. On Thursdays Wilhelmina came to teach me, and stayed until six o'clock, when she got up precipitately to go into the reading-room of the British Museum to find her husband and take him home. He was always reluctant to go, though he had been without food since nine in the morning. She used to find him so absorbed in the metaphysical world, that she told me she had to touch him several times, and even to shake him, to bring him back into this. On Wednesday evenings she would prepare for him one

pound of plain boiled rice; this, with a little red wine, sustained him till the same hour on Thursdays. He did not like to interrupt his studies just for eating and drinking. The rice became a stock joke with Blanche and me. Blanche's jokes had a flavour all their own, which I can never convey. I see them dotted along the root of our intercourse like so many signposts.

'I don't think I've told you how I once asked Wilhelmina to explain to me the "Secret of the Universe." Wasn't that a brilliant idea!' she came out with suddenly, one fine day, as we were in a little wood, picking anemones, and talking about the geniuses.

'How original!' I exclaimed with envy; and, indeed, the simple idea would never have occurred to me.

Blanche became inarticulate; some memory convulsed her.

'Oh how I wish you had been there!' she went on in a moment; 'I wouldn't have had you miss it. But you can see the scene. We were in the little kitchen. Wilhelmina was stirring the philosopher's rice; the philosopher was shuffling about in his room. Wilhelmina said: "I am an unlearned woman, I can only tell you what he told me; but this I do know: the most important part—it is called the A B C of Natural Science in the book—explains why it is that if this spoon didn't wish to

stir the rice, it wouldn't; and why the rice wouldn't boil if it didn't want to"! My dear Emmie, you can imagine my face. "Do you mean to say that this wooden spoon has any will in the matter?" I said sharply. "Certainly," Wilhelmina answered, stirring slowly; "and I often think to myself how fortunate it is that the spoons and plates, etc., are so accommodating; for I don't know how I should manage for Alexander if they were not."'

'Impossible!'

'True. And after this,' Blanche went on, laughing, 'I hope that you and Koko will leave off thinking me unkind and hard-hearted to the philosopher, and all the rest of it. I know you do, though you wouldn't say so for worlds. Could I have invented anything myself which could prove more clearly that the old man is stark staring mad?'

I was struck for the moment, realizing that she was serious.

'And Barry, and Constantine—did you repeat to them?'

'Naturally. Barry didn't seem to repudiate the explanation, but, of course, I didn't understand any of the stuff he eagerly overwhelmed me with. Koko muttered something about gravity and inanimate matter, but he is getting impossible about Barry now that he is beginning to feel uneasy about him.'

We were on our knees in a thick growth of bluebell spears, among slender ash saplings, our half-filled

baskets at our sides, our gloves lying about. The sky was tenderly blue, and the sun was warm. Blanche turned a little away where more wind-flowers nodded invitingly. I went on picking. Suddenly she threw over her shoulder at me:

'I shall hate the ridiculous old fool if he worries Koko any more.'

It was like a shot rattling out in the stillness. I looked up at the sky through the bare twigs, dumbly and immediately antagonistic. She took my silence for sympathy, and went on excitedly:

'Constantine has got to get his book done—we want the money. I won't let him fool about any more. As it is——'

Glancing round, I saw that her hands were clenched on the delicate flowers, which she was pulling up by the roots, earth and all.

'*You* are impossible,' I said shortly, and I got up and moved further on.

The wind was making sudden rushes, high up in the tops of the old beech-trees, standing like sentinels here and there in the copse; but, as I stood with my back to a giant trunk, looking up, I felt the sun quite hot in my face. I came slowly back to where I had left Blanche and said:

'Putting the "Secret of the Universe" and all that aside, don't you really feel that there is something very fine, very delicate in Barry? It seems to me he is such a rare type of idealist, an idealist without

sentimental alloy. That's what I meant when I said he was precious—all of one piece. There's nothing cloying or sickening about his idealism, and I think it must be partly because of the purity of his nature, and partly because of his sufferings, and his feeling for suffering. When one has suffered, one distinguishes between true and false sentiment.'

'We shall never agree. What's the good of talking?' returned Blanche. 'You are on a wrong tack altogether, I assure you; what you've just said is a proof of it. Your pure idealism won't land you anywhere, unless in heaven,' she laughed scornfully. 'I hate to hear you talk such rubbish—to see you try to delude yourself. Barry is a good old fool, and that's all about it.'

'Constantine feels just as I do,' I persisted, still anxious to make my point.

'Oh, Constantine! we all know what he is, but just see where his habit of idealizing leads him sometimes. Of course he's splendid; still, he has his weaknesses. Don't grovel before him, my dear. Well, *I'll* certainly open his eyes as to Barry, if I can; it won't be my fault if there's trouble. You say there's nothing *sickening* in this Russian form of mania; I don't make such fine distinctions, all mania is sickening to me. I never could endure anything approaching the maudlin.'

'Maudlin?' queried I. 'But isn't it your favourite, Nietzsche himself, who says somewhere that idealiz-

ing does not consist, as is commonly believed, in an abstraction of the insignificant, but rather in an immense forcing out of principal traits so that the others disappear? Isn't *this* what Constantine and Barry do? Are they not *artists* in the way they enrich what they touch?'

I spoke with emphasis. Blanche became crimson.

'You're right; there's truth in that,' she said earnestly; and then she passionately cried: 'But why does Constantine choose to enrich the insignificant, to lavish himself always on trash? Answer me that.'

I didn't answer, but I said after awhile, half to myself:

'I wonder you like to have me about, then; I'm tarred with the same brush.'

'Oh, you! No, my dear, you, you know, only dabble in the moonshine; you're experimenting. You'll turn sharp round some day, but Barry is the real thing: he is dangerous.'

'How you come out!'

'Does that surprise you?' Blanche got up lazily. 'I'm not an idealist.'

Her expression made me wince.

'You hope to soften me in time,' she continued, picking up her gloves. 'Well, go on, try as much as you like, I won't prevent you; but don't, I beg you, set Barry at me, for I warn you that would be too much; I should turn the old idiot out of doors.'

She meant it. I had to acknowledge that she was entitled to her own point of view.

VII

It was true. Barry lay heavily on Sylvester's conscience. Not a single copy of the 'Secret of the Universe' had been sold. Sylvester at last had an inspiration.

As I drew near the little road in Willesden one Monday, going for my lesson, in a narrow dark footway between houses, with tarred posts in the opening, I ran up against him, walking so fast, in his swinging manner, that he nearly tumbled over me. His cheeks slowly flushed, his eyes sparkled; he wrung my hand.

'You're going there? I've just been. I've something to tell you—a plan. Come to the station; they are talking—they can wait.'

He drew my arm within his and walked me on. It was strange, it struck me afterwards, this immediate taking for granted that now one subject was uppermost with us, that it embraced the others. Our perception of this excited us. I wondered if Blanche had spoken; and, if so, what she had said.

'We must take Barry's mind off the "Secret of the Universe," he's taking its failure to heart so; he may go crazy—a delicate brain. It *may* be all right, of course, all the time, but how can *we* tell? They are hard up, poor old people, and worse, they are proud, incredibly proud. I've given him a new idea —to write his autobiography. He's had an interest-

ing life. He took a prominent part in an important movement; he was behind scenes, and knew people; he ought to write something good; and if he can't write—well, I'll look it through myself, you know. I take upon myself to find a publisher. You might help, perhaps. I'm not sure about his style—whether he has any.'

'He'll write in Russian, I suppose?'

'Yes; one can't really do anything good in a foreign language unless in the most exceptional cases. It's like trying to speak with a stone in one's mouth. To write in another language makes the thing dead at once—takes the spirit out of it. Blanche reads Russian as well as I; she will translate. I will give the final shape; a lot of trouble, but worth it. Poor people! besides, the thing can be done—well done.'

He had spoken slowly, as usual, but so emphatically that people turned to look at us. I can't forget it—the narrow, noisy street, half in shadow, the slovenly-looking houses, with untidy strips of front garden and shell rockeries, the cards hung askew with the legend 'apartments,' the mean railings and rickety gates, the children running and shouting, the barrel-organ, the milkman, all rise in a picture together with the noble, happy face of Sylvester. Of course I assented warmly. He was as grateful, I thought, as if I had originated the idea, an idea with which he was so pleased that it seemed as if he would

hardly be able to refrain from taking the material from Barry and using it himself. The sketch of the book grew alluringly under his hands; it was the joy of the artificer. We were nearing the station: we were out of the little streets; a wide, triangular space lay before us. Suddenly he stopped.

'Look,' he said, pointing with my imprisoned hand to the late afternoon sky; 'there is peace.'

In the serene blue, the faint blue of early spring, floated, far away, tiny clouds like puffs of reddish smoke. The sinking sun suffused the clear air with golden radiance. A bird twittered, left off, began again. We gazed into that calm distance. Singular! I wanted to speak, to say something very important; I sought for it as one strives to recollect a dream, and like a dream it was gone. Did I have at that moment a glimpse of implacable Fate, of the beginning and the end of things? I can't tell, but my heart seemed to contract.

'Do you know, I won't go back; I'll telegraph. I'll come with you,' I said with a painful effort. 'The Barrys are too taken up, too happily excited, to miss me now.'

'No, no; you must go, really; they expect you. You must go,' he said very earnestly. 'I want you to encourage them,' he added.

'I can't go,' I answered, looking back with distaste to the street we had come along, stretching chill and dirty behind us; and I suddenly felt a rush of warm

feeling towards Blanche, and as if I had misjudged her that day in the wood.

'I don't know why, but I feel as if I can't,' I added decidedly.

Sylvester made no answer at first. We stood apart, idly looking before us into the clear, exquisite sky. It seemed as if this question whether I should or should not turn back, only just arisen, had in a moment assumed vast proportions, as if it were to be in some way decisive for the Barrys—as if we both felt that it might be so in the silence which now fell upon us; and strange, though we had been talking so earnestly, as if till now we had been merely acting parts.

'Won't you spare some sunshine to them?' Constantine said at last, smiling sadly, and passing his hand over his forehead.

I looked on the ground at this, and then, with another effort, brought out:

'Your idea about his writing his life *is* splendid, dear Constantine; but couldn't he write it in Russia, and send it over? Couldn't it be managed? Oh, ought not—oughtn't those two people to go back home before they get more disappointed, before it is too late?'

Sylvester's face grew tragic as I spoke. I looked into it as into a wide landscape. Some painful emotions which I didn't comprehend seemed contending within him and rising. With the same fascination with which I gazed at him then, I have

watched a storm in Nature come on, too much awed and interested to be alarmed.

'Is that your own idea?' he said sternly.

'Yes.'

I felt vaguely that the region at the back of his mind was just as full of mysterious promptings and whisperings as those regions of the atmosphere where the winds rise, and I felt that my thoughts and impulses arose as mysteriously. He scrutinized my face; his expression softened in a moment; his doubt, or whatever was troubling him, died away; a wistful, tired look came into his eyes.

'Barry won't go,' he said simply, looking down.

'Ah—— Oh, Constantine, I didn't know! Forgive me.'

'My dear child! my dear child!' he said.

VIII

I had long wanted—we all wanted—to get an expert opinion upon the 'Secret of the Universe.' The Barrys' disappointment oppressed us. It seemed hard that Barry, for his political faith, should be cut off from the scientific friends of old days in Russia who might have helped him.

There was an old friend of our family, clever, kind-hearted, testy, not to say irascible, and a Fellow of the

Royal Society. He lived in the country; he was an invalid; he had plenty of leisure. I wrote to him, enclosing a synopsis of the 'Secret' in English, briefly sketched Barry's history, and boldly asked his aid in bringing the work to the notice of the Society.

Barry had often impressed upon me the fate of unannounced scientific work. It dropped, as it were, from the secretary's hand into the waste-paper basket.

In a week or so our friend wrote:

'. . . For Heaven's sake send me the German translation: the synopsis has given me bad dreams. It doesn't proceed on orderly, scientific lines. I suddenly come upon, "The next great stage in *evolution* is the *creation* of the organic matter and the all." "The *evolution* of consciousness out of thought begins by *creating* chemical compounds." Such passages make my brain reel. It is true I am recovering from my third attack of influenza. I am in a weak state: the translation is probably defective——'

Upon this I spoke to Barry. It was only too likely that the translation *was* defective, seeing that Sylvester, who had made it, admitted that it puzzled him completely. But I had hopes. As for Barry, he was delighted; this had been his dream, it seems. In the enthusiastic tribute which he delivered on the spot, marching up and down the room, the Society shone like gold from the agate of the burnisher. He

insisted on immediately sitting down and composing a letter to my friend, to be passed on to the Committee, which, he said, ought to accompany his work and fully explain his position. He wrote it with difficulty, in his broken English, and superintended my more literal than graceful version. Some of the passages seemed pathetic then, but they seem even more touching as I read them over to-day. He began:

'I send to the Honourable Royal Society the MS. translation in German of a portion of my book "The Secret of the Universe." This portion, which I have translated myself, relates to the evolution of the world, by the thinking power of the unities of matter. I cannot afford to publish it in German, and the Russian edition, printed in London, is not allowed to circulate in Russia. I find myself in a position from which there seems to be no issue, unless, through the Royal Society, I can make my own work known to English scientists.'

The letter went on:

'Rigorously persecuted by the Russian Government, and while living in exile, I wrote scientific books and articles in the best Russian periodicals, which gained for me renown, not only among scholars, but from the public, insomuch that I can say that I have educated a generation. It has taken me twenty-five years to evolve my idea of the thinking power, and it seems to me that it is not possible that a man known in his native country, as I was known, could labour

for twenty-five years in producing an idea which is worth nothing.'

After developing this idea at some length, the letter ended:

'I have done what I could, but the task of substituting the idea of the thinking power in place of the automatical idea is so hard that it can only be adequately accomplished by the labour of very many students. Anyone who would help to save what I have done from oblivion would certainly be doing a good work.'

'Known as I was known'—there, I feared, lay the fatal mistake.

Blanche had before now explained to me exactly on what grounds Barry had achieved his celebrity. Sylvester confirmed her.

'Perhaps the best parallel example we can give,' he said, 'is the enormous popularity of that inartistic story ——. It expressed the right sentiments at the right moment. Barry's book did the same; it stated the case of the Russian working-man. It was quoted as a work of science. I looked it up the other day out of curiosity. I see that it has practically no scientific value at all: the facts are wrong.'

'The poor man has outlived his popularity. Russians are proverbially forgetful,' added Blanche.

Thus the Sylvesters. But I, of course, sent the letter, together with the German translation, to my friend.

I shall never forget the moment when, after a considerable interval, I received the reply. I was in a particularly cheerful frame of mind; one generally is, I notice, on the eve of getting a blow; or is it perhaps the shock and the contrast which make it seem so? A gray envelope—several closely-written sheets. The first few lines set me off on an agitated walk up and down the room, my finery rustling like an alarmed peacock's—for, after my lesson with Madame Barry, whom I expected from minute to minute, I was intending to rush away to a party.

The shock over, I became absorbed in the letter. I have it by me at this moment—fourteen pages of neat handwriting, scored with great dashes, where our irascible friend's feelings got the better of him. Yes, there were fourteen pages, but a very few passages, alas! will give the unfavourable gist.

'My dear Miss Emmie,

'I am very sorry that I cannot say I consider your Russian friend's work worthy the attention of the Royal Society. A scientific colleague to whom I have shown it entirely agrees with me. What an excruciating affair! You must know that the borderland where mind and matter meet is, and always has been, the land of dreamers—the mystics of science. There is a gulf between matter and consciousness which has never been overleaped, or a bridge which our minds, as at present constituted, cannot cross.

It is this gulf or bridge which the mystics of science believe they *can* pass. . . . The mystic of science, like the mystic of religion, becomes a mystic probably because his reasoning power is not well balanced, or because he is incapable of forming clear mental presentations. . . . Among sincere, but not clear, thinkers, how many, alas! have wandered for twenty-five years in that shadowy land where science and metaphysics meet! How confident they become that they can explain the "Secret of the Universe"!

'Your friend's work is, I must tell you frankly, the language of this borderland. I will demonstrate to you in a few lines that this is so. . . .

'Poor fellow! We can only lift our hands and say "a tragedy!"'

As I raised my eyes from these words, I saw Madame Barry standing in the doorway, her hands, in their black cotton gloves, clasped before her, the loose cashmere sleeves of her jacket hanging wide from the wrists. I sprang to my feet, holding the letter behind me in one hand, and coming forward with the other extended; but like lightning she said, her eyes beseeching mine:

'Is that the answer?'

Poor thing! she had, I am sure, been listening to Barry's naïve talk about it, and what it was going to do for him, all day long, for weeks.

I plucked up my courage.

'Yes, I have just got it,' I said cheerfully, lightly. 'I will translate it to you in French. I am sorry to say that it is not very favourable.'

'Mon Dieu! Mon Dieu!' the poor woman murmured.

We sank down together on a sofa. She clung nervously to one of my hands with a hot clasp.

'Ah, this is private,' I said, turning the pages as they lay spread on my knee awkwardly with the other hand. 'This concerns me. Ah! here we come to—— He says: "I am sorry I cannot say I consider your Russian friend's work worthy the attention of the Royal Society. I will demonstrate——"'

I proceeded to carefully render the scientific explanations, not heeding poor Madame Barry. I felt sure that the cruel opening words were falling like drops of acid into her heart. Finally she burst out crying.

'Oh! how shall I break it to him? how shall I? how shall I?' she wailed, and great tear-drops fell down her jacket on to her merino skirt.

We spent a most wretched time together. The poor woman poured out to me, convulsively, all her heart-burnings and doubts; for doubts she had had, it was clear, at each successive disappointment.

There had been several, it seems: in Berlin, in Zurich, in Paris, perhaps elsewhere; and this, it struck me with some consternation, had been the reason for the protracted journeyings of which Blanche had spoken. But Wilhelmina had

smothered these doubts, loyal, loving soul. If she had to treat her philosopher like a baby sometimes, she had to make up for it in her inmost heart by worshipping him as hero, genius, god. The pitiful story was plain to me in this agonizing hour, the story of love and loyalty as against the incredulity and contempt and wisdom of the world. My mind groped after her in past scenes away there in Siberia, clear to her, indistinct to me—scenes in which he and she, side by side, gave, gave, gave, sheltered the weary, fed the hungry, heartened up the failing, never to receive themselves. It did seem hard! I echoed her despairing cry, 'Are we *never* to have anything?'—the cry that will rise when, after load added to load of suffering and longing, the march past of all we deem desirable still winds on beyond our reach.

'It would be better that he should die than that he should hear this!' she sobbed. 'He has spoken of your Royal Society to me often, there where we came from. He *believes* in it. He didn't believe in the others. This will kill him, and if he dies, I won't survive him!'

She brought this out fiercely, as a threat. I didn't know how to look or where to turn in my agitation. I exhausted myself in consolation and entreaty. I had the conviction that the grim idea was not new to her. But consolation, it was clear, accentuated the situation, bitter, because after all it wasn't for herself

she wanted anything, but for him. What is really strength? What is weakness? Do we know success when we see it? I confess that I hadn't the hardihood to assure this tired woman in her creased black garments that she held secure in her heart, in this woeful hour, the only secret of value. I hadn't the hardihood. I revered that woman.

A man—Constantine certainly—could have done it beautifully by implication; but we women haven't these indirect ways with one another. When we are sincere we are brutally straightforward.

Finally I broke down myself, and we sobbed together, two crumpled heaps of lace and merino, our tear-stained cheeks and straying hair laid on damp chintz-covered cushions. It had a comic side, of course, this abandonment to grief and perplexity. Blanche would have seen it. Still, it didn't occur to me to reproach myself for want of humour. As I laid aside my dainty dress, the picture of Wilhelmina toiling home again to Retreat Road, carrying the news to Barry, was too poignantly with me.

That she had done so I knew next morning, from the following:

'DEAREST MISS EMMIE,

'Will you be so very good as to read to my husband the English letter which you translated to me yesterday? He is greatly touched that your friend has devoted so much time to the work. My

husband wishes to reply to him, but, without having read the letter, it would be difficult to write to the point. Pray excuse my bad handwriting. I have wept so much this morning that I can hardly see to write.'

Alas! the concise terms of the letter left no loop-hole, even for Barry. I didn't go to Willesden; I went instead to Hampstead. I didn't know whether I feared to see Constantine or Blanche first; but I found them together. Constantine had just broken his spectacles; he was sitting astride a cane chair, trying to adjust new pebbles to the rims. Blanche was writing. I sat down and told them what had happened.

'How beautifully you tell the story!' Constantine said. 'Have you the letter?'

I handed it over, and with my chin in my hand, sat and looked at him.

He read it through very attentively, closing one eye and running the other along the lines; then he skimmed it through again, and sighed heavily several times.

'A good letter,' he said, handing it back. 'I like your friend; he is so sorry that Barry should be disappointed.'

Blanche forbore to triumph openly. She got up and brought her diary, in which she had been writing, round to me. The last entry ran:

'*May* 25th.—The "Secret of the Universe" died to-day, and was buried. R. I. P.'

Constantine had finished mending his spectacles. He put them on, sighed again, nodded at us, and went away.

IX

Shortly afterwards I left town, and did not return till the beginning of winter. I almost forgot the Barrys and their affairs meanwhile, but I understood from Blanche—Constantine had gone off to Armenia for the *Leader* — that the philosopher was busily writing his autobiography, and that Constantine had actually suggested to Wilhelmina that she should write hers. Wilhelmina herself sent me one or two little notes, but they contained nothing of importance.

So I was the more unprepared for the stride things had taken when I rushed up to Hampstead the day after my return—the anniversary, it came back to me, as I walked up the familiar path to the little house, of Constantine's reviewing the great work.

The sun was now shining, the laurels and ivy glittering, the birds chirping; the smoke curled up indolently from the chimneys, a butcher's boy was whistling down the road. The Sylvesters didn't expect me. To give them greater surprise, I went to peer in at the parlour window. It was shut. Blanche, I saw, was sitting at the table; her arms

were spread out upon it and her face was laid on her arms. It was the posture of grief. I tapped on the panes with my umbrella handle, and she got up and presently let me in.

'This *is* delightful!'

'Where's Constantine?'

'Upstairs.'

I followed her in. We settled down for a good talk. The news came tumbling out on both sides in a cataract. Constantine, she told me, was at last hard at work on his book, 'The Eastern Question.' He was positively glued to his desk.

'And you too, it seems. What's all this?' I indicated the mass of papers on the table and an array of pens, ink-pots and gum-pots, which looked as if the resources of the entire household in this respect had been collected there. Dust and grit lay thick on some of them, and the very aspect of the room, the stolid furniture, seemed in some way to reflect this disorder.

'Don't ask me. I'm in despair.'

Her gesture of aversion set me rummaging. I fished up various more or less closely-written sheets. On one I read: 'The activity and self-sacrifice of the young Revolutionists or Nihilists, as they are called——' On another: 'I don't know how to describe to you the public excitement and indignation when it was discovered that Professor *Z.* had been arrested, and was about to be exiled to a small town in——'

'My dear Blanche, what, in Heaven's name, is all this?'

'Can't you see?'

'Not Barry's autobiography?'

'What else?'

'Ah! you are translating it; but what confusion it's in! How can you do it like this?'

'I'm sure I don't know. I don't think I *shall* do it.' She turned sharply round and burst out: 'Would you like to hear how horrible I am? Do you know, I hate that old man! I was quite right that day in the wood, you remember, when you were cross; I felt it coming on. When I see him coming up the path there, to bother Koko, I just go and shut myself up in my bedroom till he's gone. I can't bear the sight of him. I invent excuses and send the servant to fetch Koko away. I can't bear even to leave them alone together now. You think me mad, I suppose?'

'I'm awfully sorry!'

'It's a nightmare. I don't dare tell Koko all I think; he would laugh at me. I'm not a vague person, am I, or given to fancies? but I dread this Russian. I have from the first. I feel alarm—the presage of a particular misfortune, which it seems to me I've been fighting against all my life, far back, in my dreams. It's always the same terror. My heart often sinks as I watch Constantine. I fancy he's longing to be off on some wild-goose chase. God knows I've suffered when he's been away in the perils of war;

but what should I suffer if he went away altogether into regions unthinkable?'

She bent her head and stared before her. Where had I seen just that attitude, that look before? So she *did* feel these things! The vibrating passion of her voice, my heart-throbs, the intensity of my interest, scarcely let me breathe. I leant forward.

'But how—a practical man like Sylvester?' I urged. We both listened for a moment.

'Ah!' She moved, turned, swept her hand over the corner of the table, smoothing the cloth, then looked at me firmly. 'He isn't an *ordinary* man; you know it and I know it. There's always danger.'

We were silent.

'Pooh!' she exclaimed at last, getting up, pressing back her hair and walking about; 'what nonsense I'm talking! It's folly even to think such things; it's only that I've been upset lately. Why, Barry *bores* him sometimes: he told me so; he'll get tired of him at last. Oh, Emmie, you don't know what I suffer sometimes; it's so strange—so strange! There's only Koko in the whole world for me, and it seems as though he were slipping out of my grasp. He's changed somehow lately; don't you notice it?'

'You're not afraid he'll go off on some mission to Russia, are you?'

'I don't know what he'll do—he doesn't know himself yet; but he says he's sick of the *Leader*, and he won't do any more correspondent's work.'

She nodded upstairs and added, as if to herself: 'I used to joke about genius; it's his genius I fear. It's so strange—so strange; it parts us.'

I felt an odd sensation, something very painful. Then, clearing my throat, 'Is this at all interesting?' I asked, moving about the papers on the table.

'Yes, it is in a way. It gives a picture of life under certain conditions, of struggles—the under side of well-known movements. It hasn't been done before. I suppose it is valuable as a document. Koko says it is; but the language it's in—the nonsense—it's a heart-breaking affair to translate. I'm only doing it for Koko to prevent his doing it, so that he may get his own book out up to date. I wouldn't touch it otherwise. Look here; morning after morning for the last fortnight I've sat down at this table, and I haven't done a line. The task lay like a heavy weight on my very heart. I to translate *Barry!* Oh, how I've got to hate his handwriting even! You may well say confusion! I take up a sheet, look at it, and push it away; then I take up another, and so it goes on. Always the same, nothing done, while I sit here as if paralyzed. Do you know, I'm almost ashamed to say it, but just before you came I was actually crying.'

I made an impatient movement which upset an inkpot. We sprang to look for blotting-paper with exaggerated anxiety. When the slight diversion was over, and we had mopped up the ink, I

proposed starting afresh with the work, she translating aloud and I taking down.

'I know you'll soon get as sick of it as I do,' Blanche said.

We threw open the window and began at once.

Sylvester came down to luncheon in good spirits. He had done a fairly satisfactory morning's work, so that we were almost a merry party; and then, we had so much to tell. He approved of our plan.

'You see,' he said, as he put some beetroot on my plate, 'to translate anything inartistic is hard labour —simply hard labour for Blanche; she can't forgive the author, and I must confess that in his writing Barry is dry—dry as a stick. He can't visualize, he can't make living pictures, he can only spin out sentiments and theories; he gives one a nice little group of facts—something promising—and presto! he is off at a sublime tangent.'

'Ridiculous tangent,' corrected Blanche.

'Well, dear, that depends on the point of view. His interpretations of certain well-known facts, for instance, would be wrong in a work of reference; in an autobiography they may be distinctly picturesque. Madame Barry, on the other hand—I wronged her— writes a charming little French style. She writes much better than he does; she gives just those little touches that make a book living. In her book she will give the personal side of their life. Barry, of course, wouldn't condescend to that. I have read

her first chapters; they promise very well, and I thought, Emmie, that turning them into English would be a nice little job for you. Here and there where the narrative isn't vivid enough you might cross-question her tactfully, drawing out little pictures of people and places, which you can then etch in in your own manner. Her fault is that she writes too evenly—charmingly, but too much like the grandmother she is for the public.'

'Yes, I particularly want the book to be a success,' joined in Blanche; 'for imagine, in his precious autobiography the philosopher never once mentions her existence, except to say that on such and such a day he married. He married her in prison, you must know, to drag her into exile with him; he makes nothing of that. These geniuses!'

Our spirits rose. We all pegged away again in the afternoon, and for days after that. What fun Blanche and I had sometimes at that parlour-table! How we laughed till we cried over that autobiography! how our screams disturbed Sylvester, and how he came running down to see what was the matter! How he laughed too! I don't remember the details now, only that from the day Barry became Professor of Law in St. Petersburg he strode on till the closing chapters, a tragic figure through oppression and chicanery; down a vista of arrests, imprisonments, exile, sufferings, in an atmosphere vibrating with indignation and revolt. We, of course, very

soon revolted against that perpetual word 'indignation'; we had so soon exhausted the available equivalents. The 'anger mingled with contempt' supplied by the dictionary didn't go very far. All the good and intelligent people whom Barry had met had necessarily been indignant about something, and this was the one prominent fact which he seemed to remember about them. Blanche was impatient; I was flippant. When the miseries on the page grew heart-rending, I became hilarious. I surprised Blanche; but we had a fear that if we didn't treat the whole thing as a tremendous joke, we should never get through with it.

The chapters on the Polish exiles whom Barry met in Siberia—the best chapters—were also the most painful, and, strange to record, reduced us oftenest to hysterical laughter. We might laugh; it was well we did. The book gained on us, and, as we proceeded, the figure of the unconscious hero—of this noble old man—stood out clearer and clearer. Childlike vanity was writ large over the pages, but his essential character shone through their gloom like a vein of gold in a dark place. Such apostrophes, coming as climax to a burst of indignation, as 'Nicholas I., I abominate you! Alexander II., I defy you! Alexander III., I despise you!' would reduce us to that feebleness in which the pen falls from nerveless fingers, and one leans back, in inward vision, between laughter and tears. They were so

natural and yet—— Certainly, if Barry was a strange person at any time, he was stranger still in his book.

One evening, as we were walking to the omnibus, I asked Sylvester why this was, and why the autobiography, a serious work with whose tendencies we were in sympathy, produced in us such very mixed feelings.

'Oh, Barry is a visionary, and, of course, a little mad, just a little,' returned he, in a tone as much as to say, 'Didn't you know it?' 'But I regard his aberrations merely as torches serving to light up his really remarkable character. Still, I shall be curious to see how he takes our version of his autobiography. Well, however he takes it, it can't be helped. It couldn't be printed as it is; he gave me carte blanche.'

Sylvester went on to speak about himself in a shy, happy way, in a low tone of voice. I felt as if a dream were coming true. I seemed to have known that he would say once just these words. He began by speaking of his own book, saying that he regarded it simply as a task.

'It is mechanical work,' he went on; 'all that I have to say I have had in my mind a long time. I am very familiar with it. It belongs to the past. I shall never write such a book again. I hate the work just because it chains me to that past; but I want the money. Afterwards, when I am free, then——' He looked away with the air of a man who has dis-

covered a delightful secret which he may not just yet reveal. 'I thought I could do nothing better than go on writing such books, but I find I can do better. You know I owe very much to Barry,' he went on with feeling, looking fixedly at something on ahead in the road; 'he has made a great deal possible for me. I told you that, on our second acquaintance, my first impression wasn't renewed; that was true. I am an older man now, but I have received from him another, and, I think, a deeper impression. I'm not very sure about it—about anything—but—— Ah, Emmie, I am *not* content. You know what I've been: correspondent, artist—more or less—a faithful recorder of impressions, a looker-on. I care a very little bit about that now. I want to do something while there's time. I can't rest till I put my hand to the plough. I want to do something *beautiful*.' He turned to me. 'You are so young, perhaps you don't understand how precious such an aspiration is at my age. Do you guess how I have envied you and Barry your young hearts? Do you know, I wonder, how happy you have made me?'

The tears came into my eyes. No one but Sylvester could have said that. It was a reality, then, this something new in him. 'I want to do something *beautiful!*' That cry from the heart stirred me to yearning humility; but the words, 'Why, you have been doing beautiful things all your life,' wouldn't come. No words came.

I understood. It would always be thus with Sylvester. 'To what new beauty is this the prelude?' was the question to which my full heart began expectantly to beat time.

X

I was a little fearful, I remember, on the occasion of my first encounter with Barry after the fiasco of the 'Secret of the Universe,' though during my absence from town several months had meanwhile gone by. But I need have had no misgivings; Barry, as Blanche had predicted, was really sublime. He had had a shock, a great shock, which was going to leave a permanent effect; he looked older and feebler already, I thought, but he had found his feet a little, poor fellow! to brace himself for the final one.

I didn't need to see the evidences of his labour spread out on the table to know that he continued to live in an atmosphere of fine endeavour, that he was still trying hard to pass on his personal quality —his peculiar property—to an unreceptive world. He was doing it with all the means at his disposal, clumsy though they might be at this distance from his proper field. For instance, I took up a volume of Ruskin, from which, as he showed me, he was compiling

small golden pamphlets, extracting spoonfuls of British honey for the Russian working-man. It came to me at the moment that these now intermittent efforts would be his last legacy; and that, indeed, they represented him in the full meaning of his personality far more than the ambitious and, alas! still obscure 'Secret of the Universe.' Of course he immediately referred to *that*, expressing his obligations to my friend—an honourable person, no doubt, but unfortunately blinded, like all the other scientists who had seen the work, by traditions upon the lines of which they were still groping.

Barry made out a beautiful case. I didn't know which way to look as he dragged his feet in their carpet slippers up and down the length of the room, and paused excitedly from time to time before me. Madame Barry was standing against the wall with clasped hands and a beatified look on her broad face. She had been waiting for this moment—to hear him say this in my presence. She had thrust away her doubts for ever, I could see.

'Yes,' said Barry, trembling with excitement, 'they are blind, blind, blind; the light pours in upon them, but they cannot see. I am despised and rejected now; one day your descendants and my descendants will listen to the echoes of my fame and my work at the ends of the earth. A hundred years hence in St. Petersburg, in Moscow, there will be statues to Alexander Barry, the product of our two lands, who

has worked and suffered in both, striving to unite the oppressed into one brotherhood. Copernicus suffered, and is now famous. Galileo suffered, and is now venerated. Alexander Barry suffers, and will be famous and venerated.'

I blew my nose, and Wilhelmina, with audible sobs, escaped into the kitchen. Barry alone was unmoved. He had relieved his feelings, vindicated his dignity; he smiled sweetly upon me like a child as he sat down again at his table and drew towards him the last part of his autobiography, which he was just finishing.

'This,' he said, laying his hand lovingly upon it, 'will be appreciated at any rate.'

In a moment he had become absorbed. His pen was travelling carefully over the smooth paper.

This was my last visit to Retreat Road. Barry was too busy to want me, and I was now not strong enough to go. For the same reason I no longer went to Hampstead; but of the three parts of the autobiography two were now translated, copied, and awaiting Sylvester's revision.

Wilhelmina continued to come to me on Thursdays; all that winter she came and brought me, piece by piece, her own memoirs, which I read through with her, and then put into as elegant an English form as I knew how. They were quaint and sad, and writing them was, I am sure, a great solace in this new period of waiting, though it neces-

sarily reminded her of past troubles. She had been waiting—waiting for good fortune, she told me, ever since her marriage.

Her health suffered this winter. She had constant feverish attacks and troubles with her throat, and rheumatism; and she wrote very often to her sons and daughter in Russia, and told me a good deal about them. I believed she hoped that she could persuade Barry to take her to them when he had enjoyed for a while the success of his book. But everything—all they had to look forward to—depended on that. Barry would never consent to take a penny from his struggling children. Of her own attempt she thought nothing. 'I believe you and Sylvester when you say it is good, but I don't see it myself,' she said often. As time wore on she began to get anxious.

'Do you think Sylvester is doing anything about the autobiography?' she would say. 'Has he spoken to a publisher about it yet? Has Mrs. Sylvester really translated it? Did you actually copy some of her translation? How much? Was it good?'

She was for ever asking these questions. I tried to reassure her, but I didn't feel easy. I had long committed myself to the tide of reassurance as to the inevitable.

'Sylvester is working against time at his own book,' I would say.

'Yes, I know; I wouldn't worry him. I know it is important; but see how important our book is to

us, dear friend. When the little arrangement which Sylvester has made for us with the printers of the "Secret" is at an end, what will become of us? We live on next to nothing; still, we must live. I trust Sylvester; he has great influence. See how beautifully he arranged with the printers; but he must hurry, hurry. My husband begins to get impatient. He thinks some negotiations should be begun with the publishers.'

'Why does he not speak to Sylvester?'

'He has spoken, but you know'—Wilhelmina lowered her voice mysteriously and placed a hand on my knee—'he is afraid to go to the house any more.'

'Afraid?'

'Yes, of Mrs. Sylvester. She hates him so. Oh, it is true—too true. I couldn't invent it. I have seen the hate myself in her eyes when she looks at him. Cruel woman! How can anyone look at my noble Alexander and not love him? See, I have lived with him all these years, and I know that he has the heart of an angel—the heart of a child. He is goodness itself, and she hates him. Mon Dieu! mon Dieu!'

'But why?'

'I will tell you'—her voice sank still lower—'she is jealous. She thinks Alexander's book will be greater than her husband's. All the time she has been despising Alexander and exalting Sylvester;

she is afraid that the world will see and judge which is the greater.'

Wilhelmina looked at me triumphantly and nodded her head. Could anything sound more incredible? I didn't know whether to laugh or to cry. In my weak state I felt ready to do both.

'My dear Madame Barry, I assure you you are entirely mistaken. I know Blanche well; I know her to be incapable—simply incapable of such a thought. She is anxious, naturally, about her husband's work; there have already been delays, but she herself has been working very hard over Mr. Barry's.'

'Ah well, you are right to make excuses for your friend,' sighed the poor woman; 'and then it is not in your nature, any more than it is in my angelic husband's, to think evil; but *I* watch and I judge. Who lives will see!'

These conversations, renewed each time, worried me in spite of myself; they got on my nerves. It was distasteful to me to reopen the Barry subject with Blanche, and impossible to disturb Sylvester. I took it for granted he was doing all he could. I knew how long these affairs took to arrange; but I thought the old people's impatience natural. Very reluctantly I stirred up Blanche. I knew she would, at all events, tell me the exact truth. Her reply was characteristic.

'I have done my part, Heaven knows with what

a bursting head sometimes! I *won't* worry Koko. He is at a crisis with his book; you know how fastidious he is. He says Barry has enough to go on with. He has encouraged him to write some little tales. Barry wouldn't go back; he preferred to stay and cling to Koko. I am sorry, but he must wait. Don't upset yourself over Wilhelmina; she is dreadfully emotional.'

Wilhelmina certainly was emotional. She cried now at every visit. She said she lay awake all night, thinking of her misery; she was very bitter about Blanche. She said she was a woman without a soul; she spoke quite wildly sometimes. She said she had a presentiment that nothing would come of the autobiography, and that in her dreams she saw Sylvester's book squeezing the life out of Barry's.

Poor soul! I began to think that her troubles and her sleepless nights were affecting her brain. Thanks to 'the arrangement with the printers,' I knew that she wasn't in absolute want; but, none the less, I felt that something must be done, and done quickly, to relieve her.

She talked still more often of returning to Russia—of seeing her children. 'But we could not go *now* in any case,' she said. 'We have passports, but after our stay here we shall of course be arrested, and I fear the cold of a Russian prison in winter for Alexander.'

Poor people! what disillusion would have awaited them! They had outlived their generation and their activity; they would not even have been arrested!

XI

The first possible day I put myself into a cab and drove up to Hampstead. Constantine's book was in proof, and I was resolved to speak of Barry's. But when I came in, the Sylvesters were so surprised to see me, I was so tenderly welcomed, so fussed over, so scolded, that I forgot, and sat quite dazed for a time in the warm, familiar atmosphere. It was later, when Constantine sat near, happily marking his proof-sheets, that I felt the sting of my impulse again. I looked at him, frowning and frowning, as if in that way I might get to feel annoyed, and to believe him selfishly negligent. He soon glanced up under this severe gaze, so puzzled, and even a little alarmed at meeting it, that I wanted to laugh, but I said abruptly:

'I'm thinking of the Barrys. The delay is killing them. Show that you are doing something, at least.'

'Why, I'm hard at work on the book,' returned he, instantly meeting me. 'I finished the first part this morning. I don't consider it bad. The second part, to tell you the truth, is rather poor stuff. The

third part seems to me nonsense; we shall have to sink the third part.'

'What are you going to do with it all?'

'Oh, I must send it to Davidson, who is publishing my book.'

'Will he take it?'

'I think there's a good chance. It's interesting; it gives some sensational secret history. Oh yes, there are good things in it from a publishing point of view.'

'And if Davidson doesn't?'

'Then we must try someone else; but Davidson is the best chance, because he makes a speciality of this sort of book. So that's what brought you here,' he said suddenly, changing his tone and slipping down on to the foot of my lounge. 'Well, old lady, I love you for it very much, you know; but don't play tricks with yourself; it's dangerous.'

'How dreadful it will be, Constantine, if no one will take it!' I said when we had smiled a little. 'You haven't seen them for some time. There's a change in them; they have built their last hopes on this.'

He took out his pipe and filled it meditatively.

'I see, I see; I must go round and cheer them up,' he said; 'and I'll tell you what I'll do; I've been planning it for some time. I'm going to write round to a lot of distinguished men in Russia—men in place, some of them, who were Barry's pupils. They must

get together a little fund for him, and send it with a complimentary address as a mark of gratitude. They probably suppose he died long ago; but they won't refuse, and it will give him no end of pleasure. He half suspects that he is forgotten; that's partly what's the matter with him.'

'You *are* good, dear Constantine; that will be a splendid thing to do.'

'All right; and I'll fetch down that first part now, and write to Davidson, and get the thing out of the house. It will be a load off Blanche's mind. How she has slaved over that translation! I couldn't bear to see her. And don't worry any more, Emmie; I'll make it all right. You absolve me now, don't you?'

I leaned back in my chair with a happy little sigh when Sylvester had gone. How good it was to talk to him! how right everything was when he was by! His strong resonant voice made Wilhelmina's tears and forebodings seem unreal and hysterical all at once. I wondered that I had been so impressed by them. How could the Barrys come to harm when he was tramping about so strongly overhead, so eager to serve them? He called out down the stairs that he was plunging into the second part. Blanche's manner, as well as his, helped to dispel my wretched uneasiness. I reflected that in my weak state I had been something of a victim to our emotional friend, and I ardently wished she might have been with me to

witness the alacrity with which Blanche hailed the idea that Constantine should forthwith attack a publisher on Barry's behalf. I would not have equally wished her to catch the anxiety with which, as she arranged my cushions, she murmured:

'The affair *is* turning into a tragedy, as I predicted, you remember, almost from the beginning. First it was I, now it is he who has taken that autobiography in aversion. The more he looks into it, the less he likes it. He wouldn't have gone on with it, he wouldn't have done what he has, if I hadn't let him see me crying about it. He can't stand that. I have to do it sometimes. He knows as well as I do what a thankless task it is to tinker up other people's work, but he can't refrain from giving encouragement if he sees the least spark. I wish to goodness—oh, how I wish!—he had let well alone! How dearly we are paying—all of us!'

Still, as we grouped round the table in the lamplight that evening, in the cosy little room, we didn't feel very miserable. Constantine, with his pipe in his mouth, was writing what he called a strong letter to Davidson, and, as he looked up from finishing it at us, he said, smiling:

'Aren't we happy!'

A delicious sensation of languor kept me silent where I lay. Blanche, more energetic, stretched out her hand for the letter.

'I hate to leave you, children,' she said, 'but, for

my sins, I'm going to do up the parcel and take it to the post myself.'

A wearisome time followed. Alas! Davidson refused the book straight off; he said he was going to spend a good deal in advertising the 'Eastern Question,' and making it a great success. The public wanted it, and they didn't want Barry's autobiography. They loved Sylvester, and they had never heard of the philosopher. Constantine raved, and said Davidson was an idiot; and then he calmed down, and Blanche packed up both parts this time, which travelled with a fresh letter to someone else.

'If necessary, I'll publish it at my own expense, or by subscription, or anyhow; but I simply can't break to him that Davidson refused it. It means much more than the money question, you see; it's the "Secret of the Universe" all over again.'

Sylvester was agitated; he paced up and down the room, Blanche and I staring at one another, and at him. Finally Blanche said:

'I think you're wrong, Koko—I do indeed. But you know what I think, darling, that you pursued a wrong policy from the beginning. Now, it's difficult—but I think you ought to go straight to him and tell him the truth.'

Constantine appeared to be examining a picture on the wall, bending his head to look at it closely. He half turned to me. No one spoke for a moment.

'*I* couldn't do anything else; I agree with Blanche.

You are different; you will go your own way,' I said at last.

It seemed to me that I stated a profound truth, and that the very walls were listening. Constantine began to walk again.

'I can't tell him,' he said. 'It will break his heart,' he said again. 'We must deceive him.'

He paused.

'Very well,' Blanche answered, 'and you will do it beautifully, so beautifully that you will deceive even yourself. I know you.'

'Oh, don't be afraid; the book will be accepted, and that will be the end of it,' Sylvester said cheerfully. He left the room.

'Isn't it extraordinary,' Blanche went on to me when we were alone, 'how Koko, who is truth itself, gets himself into such positions? His heart is too tender; he can't bear to give moral pain to the meanest creature, yet he goes through bloody campaigns without turning a hair. *This* sort of thing tortures him; he broods over it. I wish Barry was at the bottom of the sea!'

I was silent.

'Wilhelmina hates me, doesn't she?' said Blanche suddenly. 'I'm sure she has often told you she hates me.'

I smiled wanly.

'I can guess what she says,' pursued Blanche; 'she has told you that I won't let Barry come on

Saturdays now, because his coughing disturbs my guests. Isn't it so? Ah! I know it is. And I'll tell you why I know, because Wilhelmina is a *fool*, and it's just the sort of silly thing she *would* say.'

Blanche's penetration astonished me; it seemed as if she had been listening to the good woman's interminable confidences.

'Yes, Wilhelmina is a fool,' my perspicacious friend went on with decision; 'she hates *me*, who tried to serve her husband. She thinks that I am Koko's evil genius, and would be yours if you weren't so immaculately angelic. I know—I know everything; and you, my dear, were feeling guilty at hiding all this from me, for fear of hurting *my* feelings. You are nearly as bad as Koko; but you don't encourage him, that's something. As a matter of fact, I'm rather fond of Wilhelmina. She's a good soul; and in spite of all her tears and lamentations, and holding up of hands over my wickedness, she's an awfully happy woman. She doesn't see a blemish in Barry. I shouldn't wonder,' Blanche continued, fixing her sombre eyes on my startled face—'I shouldn't wonder if she attributes my machinations to *jealousy*, fear lest her husband should eclipse mine. As if anyone would dream of comparing them! Yes, oh yes; I assure you, she's fool enough. Besides, what other motive could I have?' Blanche laughed sardonically. 'Jealous of Barry! What a joke! What idiots people can be!'

In the pause which followed we heard Sylvester humming to himself out in the hall; he seemed to be swinging clubs, from the whirring noise.

'C'est là que je voudrais vivre, c'est là, c'est là!' he hummed happily.

Her face softened.

'I married a dreamer—he's dreaming; the land of dreams, *c'est ça*,' she said under her breath.

XII

What were we all dreaming of? Sylvester's book came out in due course; it was a success, and sold well, but still nothing was done with Barry's.

Madame Barry got desperate. I see her now, as she sat with me time after time, with streaming, red-lidded eyes and tears blotting the pages of her manuscript. I hear my ineffectual words as I tried to change the current of her thoughts. Again I am blaming myself for a fool to be so moved, as I weep tears of physical weakness. I hear the oft-repeated lamentations. Again I mark the now invariable omission of Blanche's name, the clinging trust to Sylvester, the piteous turning to me; finally, the look of fear in Wilhelmina's eyes. The look haunts me—the look that comes into the faces of children and the doomed when they don't understand the reason for their punishment. I see, I hear; and the

words of Blanche's letter ring again in my ears, as they did during that time: 'She is dreadfully emotional.'

One day Wilhelmina said solemnly to me:

'Do you believe that the wicked will be punished?'

I was startled, but replied:

'I believe that in many cases wicked deeds bring their own punishment.'

'Ah!' she said. 'It's a question I never concerned myself with before. I didn't wish anyone to be punished, only that they should see their error and repent. But now I heartily desire someone's punishment.'

'Oh no, Madame Barry; I hope not.'

I tried to turn it off lightly; her earnest, fixed manner vaguely alarmed me.

'I do,' she went on. 'Mrs. Sylvester is a wicked woman; I hope and believe that she will be punished.'

Her aberration regarding Blanche had never taken quite such a bound. It gave me a glimpse of the gulf between irreconcilable natures. She went on:

'Alexander didn't believe in her wickedness; evil doesn't enter into his mind. But at last even his patience is at an end. He is convinced now of her machinations against him; he sees that from the first moment he entered her house she has been his enemy. You haven't read the autobiography in the Russian. Who knows what nonsense she has made of the translation? She is capable of deceiving her

husband, deceiving you, and deceiving us; she has resolved that we shall have no success in England. It is a battle between good and evil; as I lie awake at night the two spirits seem hovering over our bed. All our life and our struggles float up in the darkness, and are outlined clearly before me; they seem to mock me. Where will it all end? All I have given up, all I have suffered, mocks me. But about this book—we shall see; if she takes from us our last hope, let her beware.'

This language sounded to me like raving. I made no audible reply, but I rang the bell and sent a maid to the chemist for sulphonal. I gave the powders to poor Wilhelmina with plain directions, and made her promise to take a dose in the evening, and a double dose next evening if she still did not sleep. Then I told her on no account to go near the Sylvesters, but to let all communications pass through me.

'Alas! dearest mademoiselle,' she answered, 'you have the will to help us but ycu haven't the power. We see that. The forces of evil are against us. In Siberia we went in fear of our lives; it has remained for us in England——'

She broke down. Poor soul! she didn't come again. Quite by accident I met her and Barry in our neighbourhood, as they were returning from what was to be their last visit to the great library. Usually their friends avoided stopping them in the

street; it was sure to be an awkward meeting for everyone — Barry was so very deaf; his voice was so extremely harsh and loud. He would get so absorbed, and his wife's agitation lest he should get run over was so painful to see. The remarks of the passers-by were so rude and humiliating to the English person of the party who understood them that, upon the whole, it seemed the better way to pass on with one's eyes averted, and forego the desperate encounter.

But on this occasion I, on the contrary, sought it, and I am thankful now that I did. I am near-sighted; but while I was yet so far off that their features were indistinguishable, their faces seemed to me as lamps lighting the dull street.

Barry was moving, in his usual zig-zag fashion, from side to side of the pavement, but more feebly than usual, Wilhelmina keeping at his elbow with her short steps—she all in black with a woollen veil muffled round her pork-pie hat and floating down over one shoulder; he in his well-known suit of light gray and his well-known cap with its glazed peak lined with green, which had been recommended to him in Switzerland as the customary English wear.

Their outstretched hands sought mine together, so that we shook hands in triple clasp.

'Did you know? Sylvester was with us yesterday,' they said eagerly, both at once. 'What a kind-

hearted, good man! what a real friend! I knew he was working for us,' said Barry.

'He was quite like himself again, just as when we first came to England,' said Madame Barry.

'And when he came to propose my writing my memoirs, you remember,' added her husband.

'We felt young and light-hearted again.'

'Our misgivings fell away from us.'

'Truly, what a man!'

'He says the autobiography will soon be out.'

'He says it will have a great success.'

'He suggested other work.'

'You remember he said when you came over, Alexander, that once a book of yours was favourably received, you would get plenty of work on the English papers. Now that he has succeeded in squaring Mrs. Sylvester, you will see that it will come true. We should have trusted him more; it seems he knew best all the time.'

I stood aghast, and in vain tried to check the ecstatical flow. I tried to move on down the windy, dust-wreathed street, their gratitude, their eulogiums, stabbing me at each step. I saw Constantine through their simple speech as plainly as if a magic-lantern were projecting him before me on the house walls. I saw his visit to Retreat Road, every stage of it, from his cool reception to their feeble attempts to detain him. I felt sure he hadn't told Blanche, and I pictured her, if she suspected it, dragging the whole

thing from his reluctant lips. I shivered in the March wind. I couldn't of course be absolutely certain, but I almost saw the servant taking in at the door the autobiography, once more returned from its travels. So we moved on awkwardly, the Barrys almost getting in front of me in their exuberance, while I, with burning cheeks, avoided their glances. My heart seemed rising to choke me. For the twentieth time I vowed to perform the impossible—to contrive that they should taste success. I shook myself free at last. They stood looking after me, Madame Barry waving the end of her veil, and Barry's long arm waving his cap.

XIII

It happened that Blanche and I had arranged to meet next day at a friend's house in Hammersmith. We came away together. She seemed a little depressed, but unwontedly gentle and affectionate. I felt so sure that by this time she knew all about Sylvester's visit to Retreat Road, that I didn't hesitate to speak of it, uppermost as it was in my mind. I see her look of astonishment now.

'I didn't know,' she said faintly. 'Oh, Koko, Koko!' She turned pale.

'Why . . . has anything . . . has anything . . . is there anything the matter?'

'I wrote a letter,' she explained, still faintly.

'A letter?'

'To Barry.'

'What about?'

My surprise nearly brought me to a standstill, but she was hurrying on.

'Oh, to let him down gently. I can't bear all this delay and mystification, Wilhelmina's absurd suspicions, and all the rest of it.'

'Why, have they——'

'Oh yes; you don't know. He wrote to Koko about that wretched third part—the crown of the book, he says, without which the rest is meaningless. He begged Koko to look and see if I had translated it properly, as—— Oh, I don't want to remember the miserable letter! Koko was inclined to be angry, till I showed him how tragi-comic it was. We had a serious talk about them. Koko's compassion must have got the better of him afterwards; I *suppose* that's the meaning of this visit of which you speak. Did you say the day before yesterday—Tuesday?'

'Yes. *You* wrote then?'

'To clear things up a little. I wrote the truth at last. I said that as Koko would soon be leaving England again, it was necessary to have an explanation. Oh yes, I was gentle—don't ask me. I didn't guess that Koko would go so soon; I advised him not to, and understood that he wouldn't. His having gone of course alters everything—spoils it

all. How exasperating! I hope I haven't made a mistake. I don't remember clearly what I did say.'

'When did you write?'

'Oh, they'll get the letter some time to-day. I must tell Koko. Pooh! I dare say it's nothing.'

Blanche hurried so, she was rather breathless. I kept up with her, trying to bring her disjointed sentences to bear on what I knew, to divine the effect on the Barrys. I was rather at a loss—bewildered. I had never imagined Blanche's taking any step. I could not get my thoughts into order. So we hurried on, parting to get in front of the stream of passers-by, and coming together again further on. It was dusk. There was a feeling of spring in the thronged highway, and a bright gleam, westward through the breaks in the houses, under the flying clouds. As we turned the corner to the station, Blanche's eye fell on a placard, one of a row—orange, green, white—outside a little paper-shop. She caught at my arm, pulling me up sharply.

'Oh, look! It can't be——'

She was pointing to 'Suicide in the British Museum' in large type on the orange poster.

'Oh no; they were there *yesterday*.'

I dashed into the shop and seized a damp paper, then out again. The east wind blew my cloak all over the sheet, as with raised arms I tried to find the dreaded paragraph. I knew what we had all

dreaded now. My glasses fell off before I could see anything. Blanche snatched the waving pages from me, steadying them against the window, while a boy, who had come out of the shop, stood waiting for the penny.

'It's all right; only a drunken man trying to cut his throat in one of the galleries.'

She crunched up the paper, and we hurried on again, under the dirty archway to the right. Her agitation had communicated itself to me, thrilling me through and through. I had never seen her quite like this before.

'What made you think——' I said, pressing her arm, which I felt tremble, as we paced the gusty platform.

She leant on me; the soft fur round her neck blew in my face; her lips and eyes were brilliant. I felt as much enveloped in her strong personal charm as if it hung round us two like a cloud, shutting out the station, the passers-by, the smoke and sulphur, and every discord. For some reason I couldn't divine, she turned wholly to me, just as if there were no other being in the world. I, too, had never felt so drawn to her. I couldn't think of anything at the moment but the need of soothing and loving.

'I'm sorry I alarmed you just now,' she said. 'One has frights sometimes. I can't imagine how I could be so stupid. It will make you ill.'

'It's nothing.'

We were silent. Then she said in an excited voice:

'I got maddened about the Barrys, you know. But that wasn't why I wrote the letter; I did it quite for the best. Koko hasn't been sleeping lately —Koko, who would sleep comfortably on a battle-field with shot dropping. He didn't tell me he wasn't sleeping, but I know; and I know he lies awake, thinking of Barry—thinking and thinking. He has known him intimately, you see. I couldn't stand that; it's so unnatural—it frightens me; and so I resolved to put an end to it. Wouldn't you? I ought to have done it before, I know; but till——'

The train came in with a rush, and we found places apart. The carriage was full, and we didn't talk across the other people; but as I got out at my station, Blanche leaned forward, and said, devouring me with her eyes:

'What do you think?'

'I don't know,' I answered, hesitating, from the platform; and while I stood there anxiously looking at her, there was a jerk forward, the door swung to, and the train moved on.

We knew soon enough. The policeman-landlord himself came up to Hampstead that night with the dreadful news. Barry had hanged himself, there in the room where he had laboured so incessantly. His papers were all still spread out on the table, with

an untasted glass of red wine and water beside them. We suppose that in his over-excited state of mind he regarded Blanche's letter as a personal challenge addressed to himself, as an ultimatum, and in his weak state felt unable to cope with it. Wilhelmina came in, we think, and found him — too late, because—— Ah! I can't tell you in what dreadful manner, trying to follow him, she had fulfilled that old threat. It's too horrible! too horrible! Poor soul! poor soul!

They were, we were thankful, at least both quite dead. There was nothing to be done. They left no letter, except Blanche's letter sticking up on the mantelpiece beside their son's photograph. The room itself was the only picture of their despair. Sylvester went back with the policeman and saw it.

When I saw Sylvester at the funeral, to the outward eye he appeared like a man who has just received a crushing blow, and is trying to stand erect. But my pain on his account quickly gave way to an intense interest and admiration, which move me as much to-day as in the first throbbing moment. I knew that he had long been seeking something. He had had a restless, hardly-ceasing impulse, an indistinct, and at times baffling, clue. Of late, since he had finished his book, and in spite of anxiety about the Barrys, he had seemed more tranquil. I saw, as I came face to face with him now, that the inspiration of death had given him, in

that room, a certainty which had already taken him beyond our reach.

The outward and visible sign of this was in the following year common property. Are not the echoes of his achievement, that something beautiful he longed to do, still reverberating round the world? When the secret history of our times comes to be written, it will be seen that he took upon himself an even greater responsibility.

I must add that eminent economists are at the present moment making with their heavy artillery precisely the same stand against this great humanitarian advance that Blanche made in her acute way on the very same grounds at the time.

I have redeemed that half-joking promise, made long ago, to write something of the Barrys' story. I remember saying then that I should never be able to contrive a good ending, and Sylvester's laughing rejoinder, 'You must leave it for me; I'll make the end.'

Alas! alas! And all are gone now—Wilhelmina, and Barry — poor Barry! — Blanche, and oh, Sylvester! Sylvester!

OUT OF IT

LONDON, 1899.

YES, I was prepared for your question. I knew, friend, that you wanted to understand what it is exactly that puzzles you about me—what the something is that keeps us at every approach still apart.

The enclosed sheets will explain. I wrote them for myself. I have the habit of writing. But they won't be too vague for you, with your habit of reading between lines. You realize, of course, that it is only for you I would do this—that I wouldn't give him away to anyone else; and, of course, I know that you won't give me away.

Well, then, you are as familiar with his portraits in the shop-windows as I was, and if you will recall two of them—one in which the head is poised forward, the gaze attentive; and another in which it is thrown back, the gaze abstracted—there you have the clue to my story. And didn't you with me often catch sight of him passing our windows on foot, slowly or

fast? You remember he walked very badly—in a kind of shuffling way, swinging his stick, conveying the impression that it was quite unimportant when or where he might arrive?

Keep that figure before you, with the impression you already have of his public life. These pages will tell you something of his private life and mine; and I think, I really think, that then you can't fail to understand why every now and again I give you that odd impression you speak of and resent. Send me back the enclosed when you have read it. Good-bye.

I

Out of life, aside, without a stake in it. How can anyone believe this of us, when, with all our opportunities, we didn't realize it for so long ourselves? And yet this is the most interesting fact about us that I have to tell, the one thing in all that concerns him (now more than ever the property of the public) that is my own, that no one else *can* tell. Why we didn't realize it, why we simply couldn't at first for several reasons, is what I must try to explain. For, of course, we completely deceived ourselves, each playing up to the other's lead so superbly that, after all, it was only by the merest accident we found one another out, saw that the delicate, skilful game was

up. For that the game was up most decidedly, that whatever our chief concern might be, it wasn't in being *in it*—in life, that is to say—in love with it, interested in it, genuinely, unselfishly, we knew very well the moment we saw through all the intricate play.

The great delusion began from the very first moment of our meeting, even before we had met, I may say, for I, at least, had known of him long before by report. How could anyone, not absolutely buried, avoid catching something of the blare and glare in which he moved, poor fellow? It continued till just recently. Everything, you see, was in the conspiracy against us—except our candour, which was not concerned till we became conscious of what had happened to us.

The first impression was mine, more or less like other people's, I suppose. Of course directly I saw him face to face I forgot what it had been. I am only beginning to be reminded nowadays by the things which people find time, amid their occupations, to write and say as regards their own. In any case, the futility of any impression I may have formed was very soon apparent.

He paid the penalty of this reputation of his always to the last farthing. He was never let off. And so naturally my very first notion of all, derived from the newspapers, was that he was immersed, head over ears in it, fighting, struggling, panting,

in the full enjoyment of all it contained, all it meant.

I was envious, a little tormented. I was just beginning to more fully realize my inability ever to be in it myself. Since I couldn't hope to take part, I would at least have liked a nearer view. He seemed so splendid down there, right in the midst of the dust of the arena. I would have liked, at least, that he should hear me clap my hands from my narrow seat high up against the sky-line. And then I reflected that he wouldn't, after all, couldn't care for that sign, for he would not think I was in a position even to be able to appreciate.

It was just that, his being in it, and my being out of it, that created the impossibility—so it seemed to me. Obviously—given his particular reputation, a reputation unique to-day, I believe, for successfully leading forlorn hopes, losing causes—he possessed those large sympathies that I so painfully, to my own sense, lacked. Otherwise shouldn't I be in it myself — able to meet him on his own ground? Shouldn't I have a record to show, however small, or at least the ambition to make a record? As it was, I was extremely conscious that I had, either of interest or aims, simply nothing, unless a fitful curiosity regarding those who had, those who were in it, be counted to me. I was indeed so entirely motiveless that I appeared to fill my part of spectator in a manner to leave no room for any

other possibility. It was on the very day of my making these reflections with some small bitterness that we met.

It was in the evening, this first meeting. I remember it all very well. Besides, haven't we jokingly, tenderly, gone over its every detail ever so many times since, refreshing one another's memories, so that I can't have lost even a sensation of the memorable moments? What did escape us both, and that completely, was the colour of it, at least, the thing that coloured the whole—our great delusion.

It was in someone's house, upstairs in two small rooms. It was, of course, at Mrs. Leader's. Haven't we laughed till the tears stood in our eyes at the significance of that? I knew that he was to be there—that he had come. Mr. Leader—we are good friends—had indeed pointed out to me the 'great man,' downstairs, on my arrival. The manner in which he let drop the information was significant. He is a sincere, plain-minded person, and his apologetic look contributed to his remark the added word, *another:* there had been so many others. He was willing to admit, however, that there might, after all, be degrees, differences. He rather gave me to understand, in his hesitating manner, that in this case he, personally, considered the title justified. He didn't always quite follow his wife's lead—he didn't mind letting us know, he seemed to call upon

us to recognise with him that the wonderful woman was, as a rule, too far on ahead—but it seems that on this occasion he ran with her, had, indeed, in his modest way, himself found the scent and started the chase. He gave me to understand that he had in this instance a ground of his own to go upon—a ground of good-fellowship. He seemed sure of it, to see it in the future as a possible covert dell of leafy refreshment against a time when Mrs. Leader's path might possibly take her wholly on to dust-whirled highroads. To miss the covert, always to strike the highroad, was unhappily this active lady's fate. The poor woman was in it—in the innermost; and she would have given almost every one of her husband's soda syndicate shares to be out of it. She knew that there was a way out; she had a suspicion that there was a short cut—a very short cut. Her efforts to find it were unprecedented, appalling; but she had not succeeded. She was very hopeful, desperately energetic, sometimes she had several inspirations together. The last had been the new music; but at the moment philanthropy, in a terribly acute form, was in the ascendant. She was grateful to her husband. He was a dear, odd fellow. There were mysteries; she wanted to be initiated. He had given never a hint, said not a word; and then it turned out he had, after all, a surprise for her, a card up his sleeve. In the nick of time, just at the right moment, with a smile merely, he had brought

the high-priest—surely he *was* the high-priest—into her drawing-room.

This was the little history I gleaned from this modest conjurer as we stood for some moments outside, I rather timidly gazing at the collection of bright objects and bright persons within, the glitter, the smartness, as of Regent Street on a sunny forenoon, of the buzzing rooms. Mrs. Leader, smartest and brightest of all (one is impressed, as by a dressed shop-front or a flag-decked parade), made me hasten forward to disarm the 'Dear me! this won't do' look which, as she caught sight of me, interrupted for a moment her quick glance round. The look which brought me inside the room made me also feel that my dress was too limp somehow, that I myself ought to be stiffened up generally, and that Mrs. Leader's approbation was something like a decoration to sit well on this altered state of things if I could bring it about. But the indulgent smile, almost simultaneous with the glance, gave me ground, and set me trying to recall, in recognition, for which of their distinctions my family was at present likely to be most favourably known, the orthodox or the unorthodox. For the latter, I believe; but before I had time to decide, she hastily bestowed me upon someone, someone else having made an urgent appeal over her shoulder.

At the first interval I looked about at my neighbours, and caught sight again, across the room, of

the great man, boyish, tremendous, puzzled, receiving from that an indefinable, disturbing, yet strangely familiar impression, together with the usual one of our being all *nice* people, brought together to know one another in the hope that from so much brilliant niceness we might strike something out.

Some of us actually did—he and I, at least—in a quite unexpected manner, though not more unexpected to our hostess than to ourselves; that I can say with my hand on my heart, remembering the slight feeling of antagonism (in spite of my confidence in Mr. Leader) which was to evaporate so immediately.

Certainly it may have afterwards seemed that we had been in a plot together to spoil her party. Perhaps she thought so; she certainly did succeed in making us feel vaguely that evening that something was amiss, that this was not what we had been brought there for, what was intended. Something *serious* was expected, something connected with a cause or causes, and we appeared to ignore the intention, or, at least, to treat it lightly. It seems strange now that we had that light-heartedness; it was, at all events, a passing transgression, not destined to repetition. We probably struck her as selfish, frivolous. Good heavens! All the time I was congratulating myself on really getting into it. I was reaching my highest point so far in that

direction. I had a sense that someone had opened a door for me, that I was being gently brought into the arena from below. I had somehow managed to leave my seat on the sky-line. The groans, the pantings were distinctly audible, the shock of conflict felt; I sniffed the dust. And if we did seem to wilfully ignore an intention, to brave out an indefensible position? Was it our fault that the rooms were small and the time short? It was this very sense of crowding and pressure that contributed the feeling of being in it at last. I had imagined it always with these unpleasant attributes.

And he, chief transgressor?

With a magnificent instinct for marching straight, for inevitably seizing the moment—his simplicity shamed mine—he good-humouredly brushed aside the trivialities. He always maintained the same delightful conviction that to be happy one's self must necessarily increase the enjoyment of others. At any rate, he caught sight of me—lip and eye shining, he declares—from his hemmed-in corner, and abandoned the floor. They were talking of enlightenment—the enlightenment of the submerged. He thinks that Mrs. Leader was nearing her suggestion for organizing Wagner concerts as a preventative for drunkenness. It is very likely. She talked a good deal about it at that time. He says that I shone across at him. I deny it. I was in the middle of something anecdotal, reminiscent. That's

my best performance, the reminiscent anecdotal. I wanted most desperately to reach my climax, and it seemed to me that I was terribly far off. I know how bored and impatient I felt. The sense of irritation may have given that light to my eye which he fancied he saw. Anyhow, he says that we were all very animated at that moment—I the *raconteuse* especially; the others intelligently alert to catch what was dropping. He envied our animation; he thought from our expressions that we really had got hold of something this time.

My manner conveyed the sense that I was not only *in it*, but blazing away, somewhere right in the thick of the fight, a jewel on some helmet. There were, of course, plenty of helmets that evening, our hostess took care of that; the game was to find out to which particular lead in the contest we were attached, which plume we followed.

If my metaphors get mixed, the confusion will only give an impression of that evening. We were all so very mixed; that was what gave the sense of being in it. They say that it was an admirable mixture, a conspicuous success among conspicuous successes. They talk of it as if it were a kind of salad, in which, by a peculiarly happy chance, the ingredients were all right. One has a suspicion at times, unfortunately, even at Mrs. Leader's, that they are not all right, that some of them must have been left out, or that a little too much of something

has been put in. But it seems that on this occasion all went well—the salad was above suspicion. There is corroborative testimony to prove that I don't exaggerate my impression—that it was an occasion among occasions. Admit that we didn't contribute, that we didn't even watch the little contest. Such accidents occur; and were there two more grateful people in the room than we?

His chair creaked—it was a basket-chair. These creaks marked stages in our voyage of discovery. They were occasioned by someone's approach; after each withdrawal our sense of mutual confidence visibly deepened.

Oh that evening! We thought we were in it—we thought we were following one another into it; we were rarely further outside. We believed that we were bringing about such an admirable reconcilement of the inner and the outer. We were wandering at will, we supposed, as securely as if we had been tied up. We were, alas!—a homely expression—dogs on the chain, who happen to have, in the shade, their bones within reach. At one point he took out his watch. My eyes interrogated. 'To see how much longer we've got.' In the face of our approaching hostess, I laughed outright; I was so glad. In our conversation, mine was the attitude of the timid rider. My spurs were on, but I hadn't mounted. The horses neighed, the trumpets sounded; I lingered. How did I know that I could keep my

seat? I had cantered in the riding-school; but how about the mêlée? He was for urging me in—not giving me time to think about the start forward. Hadn't he experience? Wouldn't I let him take the responsibility? He had been more timid than I when he began, and now he had all the manœuvres at his finger-ends. They were, after all, mere tricks. I would soon learn them; he would teach them all to me (thus he spoke of his unique glory), we would ride in the press together, banners waving above the crowd.

But in the midst of this insistence upon the easiness of the thing he burst out laughing.

'I to talk to you in such a way! You will leave me, of course—perhaps you have already left me—far behind. You have planned out your tactics. You see a way clear before you.'

I protested as well as I could. There was no need for an assumption of modesty. I knew perfectly well that I hadn't had so much as a glimpse of anything of the kind. I almost fancied that I had a glimpse when I saw that he wouldn't believe; so I desisted, enjoying his reiteration.

'The execution is nothing—merely mechanical; leave it to me, I can do that; the clear, burning impulse alone is valuable. We must talk it over. You don't deceive me; you will make a splendid rider. Shall we ride together?'

The inexorable watch came out. He had to hasten away to an appointment.

'Yes,' I responded warmly.

It seemed to me that I had, after all, a clear, burning impulse; at all events, he was satisfied. We shook hands. He was gone. I did not care to stay after that. What happened? What did they talk about? I don't remember. We met again soon, by arrangement—not at Mrs. Leader's —and this our second meeting fully committed us to all that followed.

II

For a time we were magnificently contented. We thought that we had reconciled the irreconcilable, fitted the square into the round hole, discovered the philosopher's stone at least. We believed that we were both in it, genuinely, disinterestedly; that what we thought we had distinguished as our duty and our pleasure were going on very well together. We were, of course, merely hugging our delusion, our chain. I, at all events, vividly remember how I hugged mine; the sense that at last I was right in. How did I come to deceive myself so—I, who saw everything through that veil of limitations which every hour of my own life and the lives of my progenitors had imposed upon me? Through some stray, clinging hope that a miracle of atavism might be working in my case, or simply that I saw in him

an escape, a chance? Of course I swear that I clung to nothing wilfully, obstinately, that I was as open then as now, and as always, to conviction. The fact remains that I was eager, happy, to throw aside my short, familiar past. Of course I saw a chance. Nature was giving me a chance—giving it with one hand, withdrawing it with the other; actually obliterating a process—temporarily obliterating it, at least.

The chance is over and gone, the blaze—brilliant, irresistible—succeeded by darkness. The natural force is spent; the process, the undercurrent, is stronger; it is steadily, relentlessly keeping on its way. Soon it, too, will be lost—swallowed up in something vast, vague, unimaginable. Where am I? At a point to describe the signs I was vain enough to ignore, the warnings which I had before me in the simplicity of my parents; according to some, their eccentricity; their superiority according to others; their aloofness in the verdict of most; their ungrooved condition, as one phrases it, perhaps, one's self. Then my accentuation of these points, merging them in my own vagueness, lack of attention—absorption, I might say, if I knew what it was into which I had been absorbed. But how, after all, can this chronic mood, this state of mind, be phrased in conjunction with a consistency, a lucidity, a power of mechanical performance in the affairs of daily life, which now astonishes me, great tribute as it is to the

perseverance, the artistic element, the artistic control in my forefathers? For it cannot be said that we lacked concentration, focussing power, were humanly myopic. On the contrary, we were keenly alive to detail; we were ourselves, perforce, finished performers. Mine must, I suppose, have been a family of artists, actors. On the stage of life all scrupulously filled their rôles. They jealously, inveterately, it would seem, perfected themselves; but they as desperately longed to be off the stage—anywhere, anywhere; they desperately wished with increasing energy that they had never trodden the boards. Going a step further, I, the child of these actors, unexpectedly found myself under no compulsion to use my talent, free to please myself, devoid of the ambition to shine, the burning to accomplish; never having been caught up by the mystic frenzy, guarded from the terrible contagion; surrounded only by the dead ashes of former achievements, treading at every step on the shrivelled laurels, hearing in every murmur the falling echoes of bygone applause, the long-silent tread on hollow boards; seeing everywhere the dust settled, the properties crumbled, the motionless, extinguished lamps; hearing, seeing, feeling, without a wish to revive these dead things for myself personally. Alone, alone, alone; keeping only the physical health, the clear mental horizon; sometimes fancying that on the far-away verge of that something unseen by them might become visible for me.

The triteness of the metaphor seems to me to embody the triteness of all those sensations, the unutterable weariness of all those dim perceptions; worst of all, the mechanical finish in that meaningless daily routine. It disgusted me; it was too easy, too familiar. I remember, for instance, some of my faded performances, some of the sheets I covered at a valued suggestion. 'Dust and ashes' I could have added quite naturally and truthfully at the end of every page, without letting the pen out of my hand to take it up again. When I wrote a letter, it wore to my sight a faded look before the ink of my signature was dry; the newly-addressed and as yet unstamped envelope had a dingy appearance. The very words, fresh from my brain, maybe embodying an appointment for next week, were already, to my sense, behind time, as much out of date as a last year's newspaper. My handwriting was equally, in my eyes, old-fashioned and poor. And so it was with all the exterior signs. Fashionable clothes seemed to me simply shocking. People explained this by saying that I had no sense of style. I, of course, knew why it was absent in me. But why multiply examples? In admitting that I had ceased to struggle, I present my case at once in its strongest light, or, if you like, its deepest darkness. The only relief, the only ray was my conviction that I was an exception—a unique, perhaps. I was certainly not in it myself, I was well aware, but I was capable

(my window into it) of admiring, or believing that I admired, those who were.

I was to adopt another attitude, to attain another point of view, indeed; but that was later. Meanwhile I learned to admire above all the fearless rider who offered me his company right into the heart. He was so certain that I should keep my seat—rein in eventually in triumph. But without this inducement I found his company to be bribe enough; with that I could even face the possibility of coming ignominiously to grief, nay, it made me forget it. Without considering the matter, I knew somehow that his altar was not Mrs. Leader's; I more than suspected that even the burnt-offerings had a different taste. If they were indeed both in it, if the shrine was the same, it was clear that they were approaching it from different directions. It had not occurred to me, outsider as I was, that, as her husband put it, there might be degrees, differences, when one got inside, but I soon began to perceive the importance of these. We might meet her in the press; we didn't jog on or gallop together with her. I was always willing to relapse into the jog-trot; he was ever for the gallop. I saw him often enough to keep myself up to his mark. I played my part, as it seems to me now, with exquisite artlessness. If I didn't always enjoy the shivering on the brink, the plunge in, at least I delighted in the swim in deep waters; nothing but exhaustion brought me back to the shore.

I remember how every morning when I came down to breakfast I sought and found with a proud consciousness my littered place at table. There was sure now to be a heap of letters, papers, circulars beside my plate. I opened a dashed-off, blue-pencilled note first; that whetted my appetite, and presently I sat down to my disordered writing-table with the happiest anticipations. I worshipped at my table; it became a sort of temple to me. No more ordered, uninteresting, dusted papers, wretched bits of things that I knew by heart already. Nowadays there were plenty of fascinating communications, tossed aside here and there, which I should not perhaps have time to look through. I liked even having to stem their tumultuousness a little, the overflow from his. I remember with what pleasure I bought a set of pigeonholes and improvised a file; how the table-drawers were fitted with lock and key—nothing, it seems to me, had ever been locked up before in our house; how I acquired blue and red pencils, a patent adjustable lamp; and how, coming in one day and noticing that I had to cross the room each time I wanted something from the bookshelves, he arranged them at my elbow, and by some ingenious contrivance of his own invention, caused my chair to revolve. These were signs that at last I was in it. I succeeded better than Mrs. Leader in her efforts to get out. I was swept along —I swam; it was swimming in a current.

We saw one another often, and separated with renewed energy for the campaign. I never so much as glanced up at my little seat high up there with the blue sky behind it; I forgot it. He never let fall a hint of more remote satisfactions. Apparently he couldn't stop himself; he had to go through with the worst, now that he was so far in. It was a breathless time during these months. But it was really economical to see one another, he said: we struck out such brilliant ideas when we met—the sort of ideas that Mrs. Leader expected to be struck out in her drawing-room. We need not have quailed had that energetic lady dropped in upon us. We were replete with the latest information, assisting at the birth of the latest developments. We had nothing to hide, nothing stillborn to inter.

We stirred each other up to fresh activities, one never letting the other have the last word in the game of emulation. He accomplished wonders. My notes of admiration bathed his best-ridden pursuits in perpetual freshness.

We were not, of course, left alone to our enjoyment of these arduous delights. Ardent souls, discovering that we were starting afresh, acquiring all sorts of imagined enlightenments, realizing the fabled and dream-like, clung on to us, that they might be dragged along somehow. Mrs. Leader besieged us; she even accepted me. This I felt to be the real measure of my success, the proof of my

capacity for life-like representation. Mrs. Leader mistook it for the real thing. My rendering of my part was so painstakingly accurate that she believed in me right off, and although she was dismayed to find that in him I had snatched away her greatest glory and finest opportunity, she really couldn't afford to lose me as well. She considered the matter (she had not yet arrived at the stage to disown us), and then tried to secure us both. Unluckily, this was difficult. Somehow we both shrank from this particular form our success took—this crowning sign of being in it. Something was wrong; one felt it from the way she watched our faces at committee-tables, and in a dozen other less tangible signs. How could she avoid suspecting me? I see now that she was perfectly justified, as it turned out by the event. I *was* dangerous; but neither of us at the time imagined that there might be anything justifiable in the form which her activity took on this occasion. She tried to separate us. She gave him a quarter of an hour from her busy day to impart her foreboding that I wasn't serious, wasn't *really* in it—was, in short, coquetting with the tremendous principles involved, for frivolous ends, possibly from personal motives. She complained to me of the women buzzing round him in the midst of his grave cares. Didn't I see how his too fine sense of compunction enslaved him? By accident we compared notes; we examined our consciences, we found our-

selves guilty, and without daring to discover to what extent, we hurriedly resolved to behave better to Mrs. Leader, with the result that we named a day for the great economy—our marriage. This was the only engagement we made no note of, the only agreement we didn't sign and file, the only function for which we hadn't to prepare.

'You blessed darling!' the poor fellow exclaimed to me that weary day (what we had gone through had made havoc with our public manner), 'do you know, you are the only woman I ever met with a quite inveterate habit of taking everything for granted. Bless you for it!'

'But I can't help it—I can't get out of it.'

'Of course you can't; that's the perfection. You don't question; you have always divined. You never once asked me, for instance, how I came to be in it—such an obvious interrogation. You take up a thing where you find it. You ride side by side with your comrade on his road; you accept his route.'

I didn't say that no other course was open, since it seemed all so very indifferent to me. I said I was so glad to be with him that nothing else seemed to matter.

'I couldn't go another step without you now,' he answered.

But when I was alone I questioned myself severely. I knew at times that I was only in it, if so I was,

through him; and at times I had such strange revulsions, such unaccountable lapses. Then I felt miserably dishonest. I always rallied, pulled through, and kept them from him; it was the more easy, because they invariably happened when he was called away. At such times I forgot that I was in it; I forgot to keep up—I let myself slide. With an unanswered letter before me, an unchecked account, my hand would steal to my cheek, and I would sit for hours and hours—rapt—where was I? I liked to think when I returned to myself, sometimes with wet eyelashes, that he had been sleeping somewhere; carried rapidly onward in the inexorable train, of course from duty to duty, but also with a sense of present relief in the secure haven of a railway-carriage. I felt less guilty then—guilty to the causes and Mrs. Leader, that is, for I never felt the least degraded on account of these lapses in my own opinion or before him. His letters always contained the words 'I dream of you.' Dreaming! That made it all right. The fact was that we neither of us could give very clear accounts of our absences; we could never have satisfied our committees or Mrs. Leader. We snatched a brief joy in not wanting to, in not minding if we didn't.

As it was, we were not quite trusted, and Mrs. Leader had her suspicions, as I have said. To see that was sufficient to recall us to a sense of our responsibilities. We became further and further in-

volved; our position grew worse and worse, do what we would. At last it came to this, we never seemed able to satisfy her. She embodied for us all demands, everything that seemed to threaten us. Her image, armed at all points, ready for any conceivable sign or hint of action, began to get on our nerves. Why should we feel responsible? for what? we asked ourselves, and we really didn't know. At last this thing reached such a point that we only felt tolerably at ease in her presence when we remembered the receipt of a large cheque; the mention of it would, we felt, ease off the interview. All our great efforts were planned with her active, handsome, expensively-dressed person, crowned with nodding bonnet-plumes, well before us. We passed nothing that we did not think quite up to her standard for us. We were very strict with one another about this. It was a point of honour to keep that standard high. For instance, when he wrote his interviews for the reporters—he had long been delivered up in bonds to them for the causes—I charged him to think only of her. It was sufficient. He was grateful for that idea of mine; he had been used to think chiefly of the reporters, but the idea of Mrs. Leader and the nodding plumes helped him wonderfully, he said; she was much better.

As for me, I was no good at all with reporters; they tried to get me when they couldn't get him, and I tried to pass them on to her. I seemed to

lose any wits I had when I was asked questions. I was guilty of the ineptitude of repeating them aloud, as if to hear how they sounded in my own voice, whereupon my friendly tormentors would try to help me with insinuating inflections in theirs. When their indulgence (as with a shy child) failed, they would adopt an expostulatory tone, or lending a plainly inattentive ear, would in a business-like manner put down what I ought to have said. And they knew so much better than I that in the end I generally gave myself completely and apologetically away.

As a rule, however, the people with whom we worked best for the causes were the people with whom we got on the least. Still, we knew that we were tremendously successful, both of us. We were, indeed, often surprised at our successes, feeling afraid sometimes that just in such and such instances we had miserably failed. The newspapers, every one, never tired of telling how successful we were; and yet Mrs. Leader wasn't satisfied. It seemed as though she wanted so desperately to get at us, to get hold of something through us, that she felt herself ever obliged to make us over-accentuate, to drive us into some corner of the definite, to bring us to bay there. That she was not at all clear in her own mind as to what she wanted only made the case worse for us. Till she got it she would be simply insatiable. Moreover, she had the tiresome air of knowing our capacities much better than we

did ourselves. But we knew the strain on them. For a long time we couldn't understand why our boldest flights, the things we had counted upon, failed to please. One day, someone, evidently compassionating us, explained that it was characteristic of Mrs. Leader; she wanted to see more of us; she never would be satisfied unless she could keep at least one eye upon us always. She had said so. At this, we thought really we should have to give up; there were things in which we couldn't oblige her. If we couldn't help escaping ourselves sometimes, we asked one another, how could we help occasionally escaping from her? And, unfortunately, she was decidedly not a woman to take anything for granted; it seemed to be against her principles. She overtired us; she hastened the climax.

I was really very grateful to her for showing me in, into the middle, as she never failed to do at our private interviews, when, in other ways, everything seemed to hang fire so dreadfully, and nothing to come off. How can I hint at what happened when we were alone together thus? Perhaps best by sketching the occasion when something very nearly did come off.

It began with my perception that she had had a fright (the doctor had said that her husband was over-working), and as I realized that, and something else that I had had no glimpse of before, the weary distance between our two selves, on our two chairs,

under the shade of a palm-tree, on the parquet, fell away. I heard myself talking. What words I used I'm sure I don't know; my voice came to me as in a dream, but I felt that it expressed something with a conviction, an intensity, a fire, and in a manner that only came into being for one other. Within the four walls of the room, close at my hand, beside us and all round in the air, was something palpitating, something living, not there before. What sensation this response to her own unuttered syllables gave Mrs. Leader I can't say, for I saw her only dimly as in a mist; but I do know that she asked me some plain questions that defined her curiosity about something unapprehended, that I even began to reply, and that she was saying, 'Oh, you mean one must *love?*' as she turned to take a note from a maid who had just entered the room. The intonation, not the words, gave me a sensation as though someone had taken me up in my chair and bumped me down again on the hard floor. 'You never can,' I felt myself silently answering her query; and as I stayed on to take the edge off my fall and the bareness from her attitude, I felt it in every nerve, as she moved about, gave orders, and said the right thing, while I sat stupidly fumbling in my mind, and staring like a ninny-hammer. I stammered my adieux. Her attitude had given me a shock; I couldn't help recognising it, for I was trembling as I descended her doorstep and all the way home,

repeating in my weakness some familiar words that arose involuntarily like a moan of pain to my lips.

After this I was a little consoled for proved laxities by recognising that it cost me something very tangible indeed to be in it. It cost me my strength, which I had up till now thought to be inexhaustible, and I became more and more generous with that, perceiving that here at least was evidence, to the plainest mind, of devotion to the causes. I couldn't trust my own discrimination, I was whirled about so, in and out, but I already imaged Mrs. Leader, bonneted, poising a pince-nez to examine a medical certificate; and I felt that I was safe; she was just as well as judicial.

Joking apart, Mrs. Leader threatened us more seriously than she or we knew. She certainly hastened the climax.

III

We came in very tired, I more than he. It doesn't matter what we had been going through, it had been quite as disagreeable as anything I had ever previsioned; it was an almost startling sign of success, and yet we both felt discontented. It was already late, but after our coffee we felt that we couldn't stir, so we sat together in the corner seat in my room. We were too tired to talk. I had a

sense only that he drew my head gently down on his shoulder, and then I must have fallen asleep. He sat still, very still, thinking, thinking. He said that he was wide awake all the time, and noticed the things about the room; he lazily wondered, for instance, if there was oil enough in my little lamp, hoping that it would not burn low and make a smell, so that he would have to get up and disturb me. While I slept, I dreamt. I thought that he was in prison somewhere, and that he appeared to me in a dream, and said:

'You know they think they've got me for life; but I know better. I've found the way out; I'm going to escape. People say it's so difficult to escape. That's all nonsense; it only looks difficult. People imagine all sorts of elaborate workings, elaborate plottings and plannings; but we know better—we know that the great affairs take place quite simply. The simpler the plan is, the better it is, in fact. This of mine is simplicity itself. The one thing needful is your co-operation. The first step is to petition the governor of the prison to allow us to see one another. I have done this. He won't refuse, because he is himself implicated in the affair for which I am here. I have heard that they intend transferring me to another prison shortly. We are almost certain to be allowed to meet in the interval. It won't seem worth while to deny us. Now, I have discovered that one of the warders, Adam, is growing

blind. He naturally tries to conceal his infirmity as much as possible, because he is afraid of losing his place if it becomes known. He leaves off duty at five o'clock, and comes on at five o'clock. In these short days it is already dusk by that time. He will bring you in when you come. You will complain that the cell is chilly, and that you are afraid that you won't be able to stay long. My plan is this, that you should leave at half-past four, while he is on duty and before the lamps are lit. He won't have time to start immediately on his round of lighting up; he will have to see you out of the place first. That's my opportunity. We shall in the meantime have changed clothes. He won't notice anything; in a few minutes the thing will be done. The obvious drawback, of course, is that you will be left in my place. Don't be alarmed; that won't be for long. Your liberation may possibly be delayed a little; but it's a mere question of time; it's certain in the end. You will see, public opinion will be all in favour of it. They will let you go; then you will rejoin me, and we shall be lost together in blessed general security. The governor's answer must come in a very few days now. What's to-day? Saturday. Suppose we say next Thursday for the escape? That's giving us plenty of time, and it's one of Adam's days. If the answer doesn't come, then Monday; they're always rather lax on Mondays, I notice, winding themselves up for the week's work.'

In my dream it seemed to me that I was delighted with this plan, finding it very good. I promised to be in readiness, and that I would wear on the day a large cloak, of some dark material, that would cover him all up. Fortunately we were nearly of a height. He insisted that the cloak should be very dark, black, in fact, and of velvet, and I remembered having in my wardrobe the very thing, and a hood to match.

Time seemed to elapse. The day came. I arrived punctually at the prison gates, and was admitted at the wicket by the warder Adam, as it had been planned. His face seemed strangely familiar to me, and wore an odd expression. His manner was very hesitating. 'Ah, his blindness,' I said to myself. 'I wonder they don't notice it.' But there was something more. As we went along the corridors, he began to tell me in a grumbling voice that the prisoner I had an order to see was unwell that day; he had been taken suddenly ill in the night, had grown rapidly worse, and they were even afraid to move him to the infirmary. My heart sank with apprehension, and then it struck me that this was very likely only a fresh development of our plan; at the last moment my poor prisoner had seen how he could improve on the original programme—how he could make it even more effective. We approached his door. I entered alone. He was propped up with pillows; but I noticed only his welcoming face.

'How about the escape?' I whispered, as I bent

to him. 'Here I am, velvet cloak and all; and you——'

'Ah!' he returned, smiling at me. 'I have a larger escape than we had planned. You come in and you find me——'

'Still here. Don't say it's not all right, since you are here.'

'No; I'm gone.'

'Gone! Nonsense, dear.'

'Yes; too far gone for our little project.'

'How then? What is it? Tell me——'

As I waited, alarmed, it seemed to me that he smiled again, but did not answer, and that someone behind me said, 'Dead.'

I woke up frightened; the lamp was still burning, and he was sitting in the same position, musing, frowning.

'Ah, don't, don't! Stay with me; you mustn't leave me! You won't go, will you? I can't bear it!' I cried, clinging tightly to him, not yet quite awake.

'What is it? What is the matter? It's nothing, dearest child. You've had a bad dream. There, there, it's all right. I'm not going to leave you,' he said soothingly.

I began, of course, to tell my dream, laughing at our simplicity in it, as one does laugh at the nonsensical things that seem so natural in dreams. But he looked serious, was listening very quietly, and

before I had finished, he got up, and began to walk about the room. I sat watching him; at first lazily, contentedly, still half sleepily, until I began to be affected by his disquiet. Then, as he continued his walk, I, growing anxious, strove to discover what was in his mind, seeking to find some explanation in his face when it was turned towards me. I began to think upon all that had passed between us, upon whither we were going; the events of this last wearisome day especially were before my mind. As I contemplated the measure of our suffering, and the probability that we should always be subjected to the same, I felt very indignant. He, pacing up and down my little familiar room, seemed to me more splendid, greater than he had ever seemed, to have more than ever the air of moving in large spaces, these petty worries to be more than ever incongruous. I sat gazing at him wonderingly. He seemed at the moment a little strange to me—unapproachable. I seemed to shrink into myself—to be forgotten.

Suddenly he came to a stop, facing me, looking at me musingly, tenderly.

'Yes—yes—it must be so—strange.'

He blushed, and he had a conscious, naïve expression, such as a child might have who had done something for which he was not quite sure whether he was going to be praised or blamed.

I caught this look wonderingly, had time to take

in its significance, and then I had an inspiration. I am so slow about these things generally; I am very glad now to think that for once I was quick and in time. I got up—I suppose I looked very scared—filled with a great alarm, waking to a great joy.

'That dream,' I said quickly, staring into his face —'you were dreaming it, too!'

'The dream? No, I was awake.'

'But you were thinking it, something like it; you recognise it? Ah! tell me, what is it? You are thinking something now. You are very glad?' He didn't answer, but stood and looked at me in such a way that I cried: 'I know what it is! You were astonished at my dream—that I should dream what was in your mind. Ah, don't deny it!' I paused. 'You are in prison yourself; it's the possibility of your own escape that's occupying you.' He regarded me with the same look, but quickened to a great attention. I went on: 'Confess, you're tired, you're overdone, your terrible patience *is* giving way. Just now you were thinking, planning how to escape; you were dreaming of freedom. Ah! that is to parley with hesitation; you have flung open the door to indifference. You have made a brave struggle, an excellent pretence. You would still find pretexts, but, thank goodness! it's too late, it is impossible, it is ridiculous. Answer me truthfully, now that you see yourself in what a position you are, is it worth

while? How much longer are you going to try to hold out?'

'My darling, my dear child, without you it would be all over. You alone screw me up to the dreadful business.'

'I? Then you're *not* in it?' I demanded in an awed whisper, drawing nearer.

My expression must have been something wonderful.

'Never! never!'

He caught me to him.

'Ah!' I managed to sob out, 'and I never was.'

He held me long and silently, closely. I think we moved towards a seat. We had a sense of something tremendous.

What had happened? I felt as if a great wave had passed over me, that I was clinging weakly, but exultantly, like an exhausted swimmer who has been washed high and dry. We had been rescued—from what? We hardly knew. But we felt very secure and happy. We began to make explanations, like two light-hearted children.

'How did we keep it up so long?'

'It has been growing worse.'

We went back once more to the beginning, to the evening when we first met, when our delusion began. We saw it in its nakedness. He explained to me how even then he was tired; he had never, in fact, been more tired than on that evening. He felt that

he was no longer in it, and that soon concealment would be impossible. Mr. Leader had pressed him to come in; it was Mr. Leader's sketch of what he might find in Mrs. Leader that was the inducement. She was so obviously, from her husband's few words, in it. He would give himself another chance, this one strong dose. Then he saw me. It seemed to him that I was his cure in another form, very likely more potent, certainly much pleasanter to take. He was sure that I was in it, that I was an antidote to his slackening mood, and he explained that what held him, what riveted him immediately, were my differences in my imagined similarity to Mrs. Leader. With all the air of being right in, I exhibited none of the fatal consequences. I fitted the round. He began to think that one might be in it to some purpose after all. He wanted to learn that of me, to know how the thing was done, if I were indeed a Mrs. Leader with a difference, to find out just what was the difference. How did I fit my round into her square? Now he saw the solution—simply that I didn't, that I never had; but that my manner was a reflection of his (that was my extraordinary statement), it appeared. Could he believe it? Such, I averred, was the fact; and, moreover, that all the time I believed that he was leading me right into the innermost place, the holy of holies, that we should certainly arrive there. He smiled fondly.

'While to me you were my only chance! And

now you have failed me—such a complete, dear failure!'

We were lost in musing.

'You know,' I continued, 'I consider that I have far more excuse than you. I *saw* you in it, in the thick, as it seemed to me. Everyone, everything seemed to bear out the testimony of my own eyes, my own ears. You can't deny that common report —the newspapers, for instance—gave me a valid pretext.'

'Oh, the papers!'

'Yes, most decidedly; I thought I had a chance, and now I am left staring. It seems that I have never had a chance.'

I asked him how he made out a case. Hadn't he urged me in, put the idea into my head, never left me any peace since? Wasn't my honour, perhaps, concerned by this time, my character, what I had of reputation, to go on with it? Let him excuse himself if he could.

He didn't excuse himself. He didn't think that our mistake had turned out so badly now that we had helped one another out. And then he had been in it himself at one time, very far in.

I wanted him to go back to this time, to show it to me as it had been, and as it looked now in the present light; but he seemed reluctant.

'What is the use?' he said. 'It's so far away, such a vista of nonsense.'

How could it be all nonsense, since it had been enough for him for years?

He denied that it had been enough. Its insufficiency was the point. Being pressed, he sketched rapidly the very beginning — the boyishness, the eagerness, the hard work, the time when he was most in it, when he had no recognisable manner, when he was finding one; the time when he took all appreciation to ring truly, the little that came to him. That was a good time; one could go on very well with that. But then people began to whisper, to point, to praise, to imitate, to return him false coin for his genuine. He began to hang back, to grow shy, to doubt. Then, at the moment of escape, at the moment when something splendid seemed on the point of happening, it had been his wretched fate always to meet someone more or less like Mrs. Leader, who lured him back again, giving him hopes. He hoped that they would help him out, give him just the needed momentum; but they invariably gave him the push back, and this just when he might possibly have been on the point of emerging unaided. After the greatest of these disappointments—the last—he gave me to understand, he went away for a time, hiding himself. But he meant to return and be so genuinely 'in it' again that in the hurry of the fight he wouldn't even hear the newsboys calling. The result of this retreat was most unexpected. In solitude he came right out of

it, came to himself, as it were; he found that there was a possibility, he had a chance to be something he had never had time to do anything but dream of. After that, how could he return? How, indeed? But he returned—at least, to all appearance—and it was then that he developed his later manner, began his series of unquestioned successes. Everyone was delighted. They told him that he was better than ever, his powers had matured; it was fruit after blossom.

It *was* the fruit, the fruit of the success of his earlier manner, which was less than nothing to him after his glorious vision. He had now only to run down the slope of his popularity and watch as he went his friendly critics mounting higher and higher. He went on working very hard, hoping through his toil to come out somewhere by himself after all; but he was always in it—always in the midst; and he simply hated the enforced environment.

By-and-by there came a time when he was held to it by the unbounded, the genuine admiration, the endless questions of boys and girls. It would occur to him, as he looked into their uplifted faces, that perhaps he might have found more in it, have put more into it, have gathered more out of it, after all. But the others, the Leaders and the rest, they had his manner. It satisfied them till long after they had ceased to satisfy him. That was his mild revenge. His manner was a great shield. He

escaped behind it sometimes. He was believed by this time to be so far in that he could afford to neglect appearances a little. The paragraphs, the illustrated interviews, it was a ball set rolling that wouldn't stop; everything contributed in such a way that it simply couldn't stop.

'Let the ball roll. Haven't you done your part in setting it rolling? You are behind the shield. You are out of it. Now, at last, you can live your own life, be your real self,' I exclaimed triumphantly.

He didn't respond.

'You look as if the case had still to be made out,' I continued. 'It is clear enough——'

'Oh, it is made out for me.'

'Well?'

'But for you, then——' he said doubtfully.

'Why, then for me too, of course, for I never have been in it.'

He sighed.

'Perhaps——'

'Ah,' said I. 'Why should you sigh? It isn't like you to be so despondent. You think I'll fail you, perhaps, but I won't, never in the world——'

He took my hand.

'I think—I can't tell—perhaps—I may fail you,' he stammered.

'Then I'm not afraid,' I answered joyfully. 'If that's all, we're secure.'

'Secure; that's the word,' he replied, smiling, not

a trace of former heaviness in his face, now lifted, lighted. 'A growing security! We have emerged, we have arrived, we stand here both of us, blooming, smiling, completely out of it. We look at the clouds of dust, now to us but a tiny glittering whirl; the horns sound fainter and fainter. Something very large opens out before us——'

We were silent a long time.

'Why should you go?' I said later. 'Why not stay here? For some reason I dislike the idea of your going back to your littered rooms, to your papers, those hateful signs——'

'Never mind—I will go—and I will come back soon——'

'You are happy?' I said, detaining him a little.

'Yes; very happy.'

'Then to-morrow——'

'A new life——'

That was our last speech—our parting. He went off waving his hand.

He never came back. Something happened on that day that was just beginning—that day which I afterwards remembered was one we had talked of for our marriage. The doctors said that he had been overdoing himself. He had been warned, it seems, about his heart. He must have had some shock—some great excitement. They asked me if I hadn't heard him mention any bereavement, any

sudden trouble, news good or bad. I was not anxious to enlighten anyone, and I gave very little information to the numerous inquirers, but I received in return some which has been occupying me ever since.

Someone brought me a copy of a partly filled-in telegraph-form found among the papers in his pocket. It was just outside the district telegraph-office that, throwing up his hands suddenly, he made the last sign. There was no name of sender or indication to whom it was addressed. It ran:

'In it again. Come. Will explain.'

His servant said that, before leaving the house, he had opened and read his letters. We used to call the first post the 'appeal post'—it was the heaviest and most important in the day. I got these last letters that he had received, and examined them. One of them contained a proposition—now, I believe, before the public—which, if worked out, will, no doubt, have far-reaching and beneficial effects. In the letter it was suggested, as usual, that he should be the standard-bearer.

As for me, I don't feel any more inclined to get into it than ever I did. On the plea of my bereavement, I lead a very retired life, and it is allowed to be natural that my grief should absorb me to the exclusion of every outside interest for a time. But it is not grief exactly, it is bewilderment. He is out

of it, that's certain. But what am I to do? I am also out of it.

But if he were here! Who knows? I should probably be swept back again. They tell me that there is a great deal going on in it; things that he was in the very middle of, they are stopping, it appears. But without him——? And I?

THE END

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